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BABY TOILERS

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OF THE
SOUL MARKET





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BABY TOILERS

BY

OLIVE CHRISTIAN MALVERY

(Mrs. Archibald MacLeish)

Author of
"THE SCUL MARKET"



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INTRODUCTION

THAT this little book follows so quickly after my first, *The Soul Market*, is owing to a special arrangement I had made with my publishers, in deference to the advice of friends who are deeply interested in the subjects touched on in both these books.

It was my original intention to publish first this story of *Baby Toilers*; for surely there is no subject that should interest the people of this kingdom more than the history of thousands of these little ones who are born into their midst, and condemned to lives of servitude and misery—children who enter the world with a handicap in life's race, and grow up, not useful and valuable citizens adding to the glory and wealth of our land, but diseased and criminal burdens for the industrious to support; grave menaces, too, of our national prosperity, since

these miserable victims of avarice and sin do not decrease, but rather grow in numbers.

My endeavour shall be to make the story of these children as real to my readers as it is to me. This is no subject for an economist's intellectual treatise, nor do the lurid pamphlets of many Philanthropical Societies meet the case. No cold and leaden information precisely placed in Blue-books and Reports of various Commissions can bring home to the people of this country the suffering of the children. How, then, shall we place their cause before the tribunal of public opinion ? There have been articles and books written about our child martyrs by abler pens than mine. People have read these and—forgotten. They will read my story and forget ; but others will follow, and by continual exposure the more awful evils may be killed. I put before my readers this little history in such manner as my heart tells me may touch others.

Here it is—a simple story told by a woman who has seen and lived among the people whom she describes ; such a story as might be written by any serious, thinking person with eyes to see and a heart to feel, who has

wandered to the gates of the Inferno where these babes toil and suffer. It seems to me that the story needs no apology, no "dressing up." Let the people have it as I had it—scene after scene of pitiless suffering, of awful torture—and if they feel as I felt when coming on these things in actual life, they will rise in irresistible wrath and make an end. I had read of these things ; but to see them—O God, the bitterness of it ! I am not trying to do the work of an artist, or a trafficker in fine words ; the stories I tell have been burnt into my heart with too hot an iron to leave me much desire to paint the scars with brave colours. Others have pleaded for these little ones ; now I add my voice to the cry—“ Justice, Justice ! ”

I had not hoped for the reception the people in this kingdom have given my first book. It has aroused the widest sympathy, and one practical outcome of this interest will be, I hope, a model Shelter for homeless women and girls in the Metropolis. Those of us who are working and praying for this end hope that by such means a veil will for ever be drawn over the hideous and degrading sight of young girls, and feeble

INTRODUCTION

and desolate old women, and mothers, sometimes with babes in their arms, wandering the cruel streets of London by night. There are so few cheap and good Shelters where these helpless wanderers can seek refuge ; but I have, I trust, not told the story of the Doss House and the cruel streets in vain.

And now if, when this little book goes forth on its way, the men and women of Britain will read it, and resolve that some at least of the curses which are laid on the little ones given into our care shall be removed, then the burden of these toiling babes, these suffering martyrs whose cries so seldom reach the outer world, will be eased.

It is not altogether lack of conscience or heart on the part of the people of this realm which contributes most to the miseries I have seen—it is more, perhaps, lack of realisation of what the children suffer ; and among the general public, I fear, too, lack of knowledge that such fearful evils really exist in our midst—and this in spite of the fact that several splendid workers have exposed part at least of our children's woe. The general public will not read Factory Reports and Blue-books

nor the Reports of Royal Commissions—the general public will not read volumes of economics. Those of us who give some time to study are familiar with all these written documents ; but I am undertaking a simpler task, a more human thing—such a task as an everyday woman might hope to perform with some success, having knowledge of her audience. I shall try to tell the story of some of the child martyrs of England, just as I know them from having wandered in and out among them for more than seven years. No literary splendour is necessary, no artistic devices. The story of these little ones might make God weep, and surely it will not be unheeded by a nation which professes to be in the forefront of philanthropy and civilisation !

There lies to my hand an immense amount of material relating to the children whose history I have to write ; the difficulty is not lack of matter, but to make a wise choice from what I have. In order to acquaint myself still better with the histories of these children who are cast like dregs into our midst, I have obtained from such institutions as Dr. Barnardo's, The Ragged School Union, The Salvation Army's

Children's Homes, and places of this kind, verification and, alas ! added testimony to my own knowledge ; and any one who doubts the awful truth of the pictures drawn of these helpless little lives has only to visit one such place to be confronted not with a single example, but with scores, of children whose histories are so terrible that they are absolutely unspeakable. These children are the heritage of the foremost nation of the world.

Those of us who go down into the slums and know the homes of "the people," the proud people, who are everlastinglly being quoted in political and municipal speeches, have cause for bitter laughter when we hear the boasts uttered unashamedly by those Parliamentary lights who declare that London is sweet, and sane, and wholesome, and progressive. Trade may increase, but the wealth it brings is not added to the hopeless toilers. In one simple case my own knowledge of affairs in the poor parts of London showed me what subtle differences there might be between a Board of Trade's Return and the condition of the workers. Take the case of the furniture trade in the East End of on : it is growing to enormous proportions,

and the British workmen are gradually being pressed out. One firm of Jews alone employs some three thousand hands in their furniture manufactory ; most of these wretched workers are aliens who get an infinitesimal wage and some allowance of food. This single factory run by sweated aliens has ruined hundreds of British workers—it is not the trade that has suffered, but the people.

We gather together and subscribe every year thousands of pounds to send out of the country our own young people, the most promising specimens of our young manhood and womanhood, and we flood the country with the riff-raff of Europe. Their advancement and prosperity can hardly be counted to the glory of Great Britain.

I am glad I did not write this book until I could speak of our child victims as a mother speaks. A woman denied of motherhood is but half developed. She may have intellect and heart, but the biggest and greatest thing in the world is not given to her to know—and that is the mother-feeling for little children. I had not this myself ; and though my whole sympathies were with these little starved, unhappy things,

and my heart went out to them in longing to do something for them, I did not understand how desperately they suffer, nor how fearful the loss to England is in the slaughtering and crippling of her children, until I had a baby myself and saw things with a mother's eyes, which see clearer, and felt them with a mother's heart, which feels deeper.

It is time for a revolution in these conditions—a revolution that will make it a criminal offence, against those in authority over it, for a child under a certain age to be employed in work at home ; a revolution in the payment for work, and a Wages Bill which will insist on a just wage being paid to women, especially those engaged in home work taken from the factories and middle-men. A Minimum Wages Act, and an unflinchingly severe enforcement of it, would do much to ease the burden of the babies, and a law against the presence of any child under sixteen in a public-house would be a magnificent reform. Other heads wiser than mine might see further and suggest practical reforms which need not be talked of in Parliament for seven years, but if pressed forward might become law speedily, in the face of awful necessity.

If the history of some of these baby toilers rouses thinking men and women to action, people may criticise me as they like. I have no end to serve except that of awakening the public conscience in regard to the little children whom I have found tortured, starving, and often dying, and every single worker among the poor knows how true these pictures are.

I only join hands with those already enlisted in a war against the brutal wrongs the children suffer. May the evils of their lot be cried from the housetops, and told again and again, till the dull ears of the people hear at last, and justice be done.

BABY TOILERS

CHAPTER I

“CROWNS OF THORNS”

THE sun streaming through the stained-glass windows fell in iridescent hues on the young heads demurely bowed. Pricked out by the light, the pictured form of the suffering Saviour shone above their heads. There were the cruel rusty nails through the feet, and on the clustering hair the artist in glass had woven a diadem thick-set with thorns. It was very still in the church. On the altar, below the pictured Calvary, masses of white flowers and burning candles made radiant the spot where presently a great dignitary of the Christian Church would take his place on a carved throne, and the young girls seated lower

down in orderly pews would rise in their places and murmur in quivering tones their confession of faith. It was a great day for most of them—their Confirmation. The warm air drew forth the scent of the flowers, which mingled with the heavy perfume of the incense, and presently the deep-toned organ swelled out, and the children all stood up while the priests, in purple and fine linen, and a great company of white-robed singers, with the bishop in rich robes, paced nobly to their places.

I sat in a dark corner of the church. As the little girls rose, the sun touched their heads, which were wreathed with white and silver flowers, and somehow the scent of the incense made me feel suddenly sick. I saw, instead of the solemn church with its wide aisles and the warm comfort of it, a fetid room in a London slum. There two children, smaller and frailer than any in that white-garbed throng, toiled before the sun rose until long after he had passed to the other side of the world, making the flowers for those dainty chaplets, worn mostly by little Catholic girls at their confirmation here and abroad.

Their mother was a flower-maker before

them, but her joints are now stiff with rheumatism caused by living constantly in a sunless room. The little girls, who should have been out in the summer fields growing healthy and strong, or learning such simple lessons as children of their ages might understand, were robbed of their rights and set to labour that allowed of neither rest nor playtime ; they worked with their mother at flower-making. Such white faces they had, and such slender fingers that when the light came through the one window of the little room it seemed to shine through them as through a transparency. One child was seven, and the other ten, not old enough, surely, to be earning—shall I say their living ? Their real occupation was buying off their dying day. They had never lived, and they never would live, unless it might be in that country where folk say God has planted a garden to play in. Perhaps there He will not allow the greedy, selfish, strong folk to come in and rob His little ones.

Once I went in when the small girl was ill. You could see her forehead throb ! She lay on an unmade bed with a few rags over her, and though the little mouth was hot and

parched, neither the mother nor the sister had time to leave their table of toil and fetch the mite a drink of water. The water was in the yard, down some steps and then up again, and it might have taken, perhaps, seven or eight minutes to fetch it into the house. There was a smell of linen and paint, and from the crowded streets below thick odours of mingled decaying vegetables and fish, and all the appurtenances of a poor street, came rolling up. The mother and sister had been at work since about four o'clock that morning—they were a hand short—and they worked with scarcely a break until ten or eleven at night. They were making Confirmation wreaths, and the price paid was one and eightpence per dozen for the finished wreaths. Each flower is made separately, and every wreath requires something like a gross of small white flowers. The wire stem is wrapped round daintily with a strip of fine white lawn, and then the silver leaves are arranged at equal distances round the chaplet. These leaves are given out at the factory.

One has to remember that here we are not dealing with unskilled labour, but with an industry which requires training and taste. It

is true that the making of these flowers becomes almost mechanical after a time, but each one has to be done with an unerring skill. Cutting the wire often hurts the hands, and the shaping of the petals entails real labour. The worker sits stooping over a stiff rubber pad, a tiny jet of gas is beside her, in the flame of which she heats her small steel tool, which she presses down upon each petal placed on her pad, until it is modelled into the required shape.

Twopence an hour is a wage which can only be earned by expert workers ; the usual amount earned by a child is one penny, and by an ordinary worker three halfpence. Out of this money the worker has to provide the gum and paste, and, of course, the gas with which she warms her instruments.

Such feverish haste as they have to use, these workers who turn out the flowers that bedeck the heads of their happier sisters, or the wreaths that the little maidens wear when they dedicate themselves to God and enter formally into His Church ! Little enough my small friends knew of God or Church, or the flowers that came from any hands but those all grimy and stiff with toil.

Yet I have heard people remark that it is the personal fault of each one that such as these have to work so hard. The popular axiom is that we most of us get what we deserve—it will be a good thing for some of us if the reckoning at the end leaves us anything at all in credit !

In the East End, and in the South too, all kinds of flowers are made. These are stamped and given out from the factories in great blocks, often through a middle-man. The petals have to be separated one by one and formed into flowers. The price earned for primulas varies from 1s. 1d. to 1s. 3d. per gross. Cornflowers, which require to have a bud attached to each, bring in 1s. 6d. per gross ; violets—those travesties of country sweetness which we see about our murky towns—are only paid for at the rate of three halfpence per gross.

The making of roses requires the most skilled labour and commands the highest price, but they take longer to produce ; 2s. 6d. per gross is sometimes paid for very good roses.

But the saddest part of this flower industry is that so many little children are engaged in it.

I have seen mites of five or six years old learning to wrap the strips of linen round the stems, to push the wire through the flowers, and to do those little parts requiring the least skill. Poor babies! We take our little ones into the country, we are so careful about their food and about their clothing, and how particular we are about their rest! Any doctor will tell you that sleep is one of the most important things for a child; but these baby toilers have little time for sleep and none at all for play, and the food they get is only such as can be bought from the money that is left over after paying the rent of their homes, which are generally sub-let by some enterprising Jew.

There were Fanny and Maggie, my two small friends, always “helping mother” at her trade. Once when I went to see them one small brown head had fallen heavily on the table. The sleep-drugged eyes were fast shut, but the little hands were holding the wire. The mother and sister had remonstrated once or twice, but the baby had fallen asleep. If there were only a dozen such in our midst we could take them and feed them and place them in some home, but what are we to do when there are scores

of them? Ask the people who know these things.

One day I took the little lasses out on the top of a 'bus. They had only once in all their lives enjoyed such a luxury before. We had a meal in an A.B.C. shop. I thought they would be very hungry, and was prepared to provide generously for them. But the sight of the food seemed almost enough, and all they wanted was a piece of sugar cake, and tea. Then they went back to the reeking den which they called "home," not discontented, but merely wondering. These are some of England's children.

There are a few facts in connection with some of these Home Industries which, if thrust continually before the public, might perhaps rouse people to greater sympathy with the toilers. The everlasting and horribly subtle argument which is always flung at those of us who speak of the wrongs of the poor, is that they would be much better off if they did not drink. In the majority of cases, of course, this is absolutely true; but if you take the weakest of human beings, those least able morally and physically to resist temptation, and set down in their midst a blazing invitation to drink—what

right have you to expect that they will show more self-control, more abstemiousness, more wisdom, than is shown by any of us who are placed in comfortable and easy circumstances?

But in the case of most of the Home Industries a very curious fact, which I think will be vouched for by most of those who are accustomed to go in and out among the very poorest, is that the women engaged in them do not drink. The most powerful preventative in this case is that the wages earned are so infinitesimal that were the workers to spend even twopence a week on drink they would have to do so at the cost of food. Then again, the home workers seldom leave their rooms—their only outing is when they go to fetch their work or to carry it back to the factory. They have no time for gossip.

And yet the dwellers in these sordid homes bring into the world many children! In most of the books dealing with the question of Home Industries—even those which have devoted themselves chiefly to the trades followed by children—I have noticed a lamentable lack of outspokenness regarding those responsible for these terrible conditions. The brutal and idle

husband who spends his days loafing round the public-house bars, or joining in processions of the unemployed when such parade the streets, is never saddled with any of the responsibility which he ought, by right, to bear.

I am rather nervous of quoting the proceedings of any other country in this altogether self-satisfied England, where we think we do things better than other people. But suppose we allow ourselves to consider a German method of dealing with unemployable fathers, it might help us a little in dealing with our own child-slaves. The general public in Germany is not so generous as the general public in England, and the Germans, when they give money, want to know exactly how it is used, and why the necessity for their giving has arisen. They very swiftly get to the kernel of the nut. An idle and drunken man has no chance in that industrious and rapidly growing country. He is hunted by the police and scorned by his neighbours, and compelled by his Government to maintain the children he has brought into the world. If he is so unfortunate as not to be able to decide for himself on a way to do this, the paternal Government takes him

“CROWNS OF THORNS” II

in hand, and gently but firmly shows him how to work in a labour colony. He is kept there for two years, and so vigorous is his training that when he comes out he resolves, by the grace of God and the strength of his own right hand, never to be found in such a place again.

But we are afraid of breaking the high spirit of our own idle and drunken poor by compelling them to odious labour ! So the women and children become slaves, and the fruits of their toil go, not to benefit them or their country, but to enrich the hordes of foreign employers who dwell in our midst.

CHAPTER II

“ ERRANDING ”

IT has been said that the abuse of any one sense renders it callous and ineffective. This must be true, or else how would such sights be possible as may be witnessed any day in the richest and most crowded of our streets? Last week business took me into the city, and I walked from the Bank to Leadenhall Street. There in the midst of the traffic was a sight which, if familiarity had not hardened all the passers-by to contempt, might have won the compassion of any humane person. That very day thousands of pounds had changed hands, and many a man rich in this world's goods passed along the pavement unheeding the pathetic little figure struggling through a mass of careless humanity.

Such a small boy! He was scarcely three feet high, and I much doubt if his years numbered more than six. If they did, then

nature had been grossly insulted, for he was very thin and tiny. This little morsel of humanity was bent almost double, carrying on his shoulders a bundle tied in a slate-coloured cloth. Where he had come from and where he was going I know not; I longed to follow him and either lend him a hand with his burden, or give the child a penny for a cake in a window which he looked at wistfully as he passed. But I was not alone, and my wisdom in dealing with small people of that sort is so often questioned —my friends are always protecting the poor from being pauperised! With all the care that is taken of them, my only marvel is that the poor are not absolutely perfect specimens of humanity!

The miserable part of experience is that it makes one so frightfully uncomfortable. When I was working in various of the sweating dens in London, it was my lot to carry bundles of clothes from one place to another. Mighty heavy those bundles were! There used to come into the shops poor little girls so ill-clad, so thin and wan-looking, that they actually staggered beneath the weight of the

bundles they had to carry ; and knowing what those burdens were from personal experience, the picture of that tiny boy struggling on with difficult little steps through that mass, that stream of unseeing humanity, made me feel terribly uncomfortable. Disgusted critics will say I might have taken the trouble to read up the Parliamentary Acts framed for the protection of children, and will point out the Employment of Children Act of 1903, which among other things says, "A child shall not be employed to lift, carry, or move anything so heavy as to be likely to cause injury to the child." Wise law ! But who is to adjust the burden, who to judge what the child's strength will bear ?

I had the honour of meeting a very well-known gentleman the other day. He informed me quite gravely that there were no little children in London who were without boots or shoes, and that the working of the Poor Law System in this country was so excellent that no one ever need suffer hunger or privation.

"But," I said mildly, "I have seen children die as the result of cold and starvation."

"Then," he replied quite calmly, "they prefer to die—it is their own choice."

He also told me that no child under a certain age is allowed to work in this kingdom, and that every child is bound to be in school certain hours. Such blind complacency is, alas! a very familiar obstacle to the progress of any reform for those who are down-trodden and secretly done to death. Of course there are School Inspectors, of course there are Poor Laws, Workhouses, and Casual Wards, but good heavens! if you were to try to take every starving child, every ill-clad, hungry, and frost-bitten woman, and put them into the workhouses, you would accomplish a miracle, for these places would not hold half the numbers needing protection.

The school inspector's office is no sinecure in this London of ours, nor indeed in any other city, for a child can always be ill, and detained from school on that account—too ill for school, but not too ill to toil from dawn till dark.

I am thinking of a little crooked girl I met during my wanderings in a certain unsavoury locality. She was the youngest of

a family of eight children. Five of these were dead, one was an idiot, one was in a pitiful partnership with her mother, making flannelette dressing-gowns, and the small crooked girl was the beast of burden. She carried the made garments from their awful home to the Jew who gave them out, and from him she brought back again the new supply of work. For some time, indeed, she went to school, more often hungry than not—I doubt if there was a day in her life that she was not hungry, unless it be that one day which lived in her mind being, as she told me, “like ‘eaven.” The child had been taken with a party from the Ragged School Union to spend a day in Epping Forest. But the glimpse of heaven was very brief, and she grew more and more twisted and more and more frail, until at last one day, carrying a great bundle down the rickety stairs, she slipped and fell. That was the beginning of the end. She lay for days covered with unfinished garments, then she was taken to a hospital for treatment. But the case was hopeless, and hospitals cannot as a rule receive incurable patients. Fortunately she died, but not until she had

suffered many months. The ones who die are happy, but there are so many who do not die.

The worst of these stories is that one cannot make them funny. Even now I can see nothing humorous in the torture and death of that little child : this, I suppose, because I suffer from that universal lack that all women suffer—a want of humour. Added to this there is also a lack of artistic imagination. I might have painted little Emmy's passage to heaven with pink clouds and white flowers, and told how she heard the angels singing. Unfortunately she took a long time dying and it hurt her very badly. The only music she heard was the drunkard's shout as it came up from the street below, and the patter of the rain on the window glass.

There has lately been an instructive correspondence in several of the leading London daily papers, regarding the school work and study hours of children. It has been maintained that children of the better classes nowadays are required to do far too much home work. The hours are said to be longer than is good for their physical well-being. This

difficulty has arisen with regard to a class of children who are well fed at home, and well cared for. They have a long night's rest in a clean and comfortable bed, and wholesome food, warmth, and light. If under these circumstances the standard of modern schools is considered too high, what can be said of those unhappy children who are compelled, even when they do attend school, to work until the last moment before the study hour in the morning, resuming it again directly school is finished in the afternoon? I know scores of such children. Mr. Robert Sherrard says in his book on *The Child Slaves of Britain*:

“I have heard of boys to whom a load of three-quarters of a hundredweight has been allotted, and I have taken a picture of one, a bookseller's boy, thus heavily laden. One meets constantly with children who have been literally deformed and twisted out of shape by the loads that have been laid upon them.

“These boys were, I suppose, at one time strong, and able for a while to perform their tasks.

“For the rest, what stimulants to industry are used by parents and task masters? . . .”

If you visit the offices of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children in Leicester Square, you will be shown what is called the “Museum,” and of this he says :

“Here are dog whips, toasting forks, jagged pieces of iron, even horse pistols. . . .”

But this does not by any means exhaust the instruments of torture used on these little ones. There is the iron-tipped boot which is used so frequently, the leg of a chair, and many another brutal weapon.

The story of Child Labour may be told from two pulpits—one the pulpit of the children, and the other that of their employers. Go into any shop employing errand-boys or errand-girls, and watch the children at their tasks. The girls are generally at work in milliners' and dressmakers' establishments, in tea shops, in paper-box factories, and so forth ; the boys are employed by grocers, barbers, newsagents, and other tradesmen. These employers of immature labour will tell you that these “young devils” get by far the best of the bargain. In some cases they do.

I came upon an enterprising youngster one morning in Kensington Gardens, reading a

penny "Shocker," and feeding himself with grapes, nuts, and various goodies out of a basket which he was supposed to be carrying to some customer of his master's.

"How much will you have to pay for that, Tommy, my boy?" I asked him.

"Git the sack," he said coolly, "an' a thrashin' at home, but I ain't goin' to errand any more."

"What will you do instead?" I asked.

"Shan't tell yer," he said.

"I am awfully interested," I pleaded, "and I will give you a shilling if you tell me why you are sitting here reading a book and eating things which don't belong to you. What are you going to do afterwards?"

"Wal," he said confidentially, "I am going to join the Red Devils."

"And who are these interesting gentlemen, the Red Devils, may I ask?"

"My word," he said, "wouldn't yer like to know!" and a cunning expression came into his face. "You will soon 'ear of all London being turned upside-down, and when yer do, remember my words."

"Are you going to help to turn London upside-down?" I asked anxiously.

"You bet," he said. "We're goin' to buy pistols and gunpowder. I've got my bowie knife already. Look!" he said proudly, pulling out an extraordinary-looking weapon which he had stuck into his boot in true melodramatic fashion.

I noticed that the little chap's boot had a very dilapidated sole, and that he had no shirt on under his thin coat.

"You are forgetting the police," I said warningly.

"I ain't," he said ; "if they hinterferes with us, my word, there'll be ructions ! We shan't begin till we're a hundred strong, and we're gittin' recruits now."

I tried to elicit more information regarding this valiant band, but the small boy became suspicious. I talked to him until his courage oozed out at his very forlorn boots, and he realised he was just a naughty boy who was behaving very badly. But he worked from seven in the morning until nine-thirty for a fruiterer, carrying heavy bags of green-stuffs and fruits ; and then when school was over, instead of returning home and having a good meal, he went back to his employer and started

an endless round of errands, still carrying those heavy baskets. If I had been in Tommy's place I also would have joined the "Red Devils." It was the only chance that offered of escape from eternal drudgery.

It cost me a good many shillings to set Tommy in the path of virtue, and he did not tread it very gracefully ; but a boy who had spirit enough to rebel against a cruel fate which had set him to work when he ought to have been learning was a boy worth taking notice of. From the greengrocer's point of view he was a "devil" ; yet had he been called upon to serve after an apprenticeship in either His Majesty's army or navy, he would no doubt have turned out to be a fine-spirited man. But what in the world are you going to do with lads who at eleven years old are set to carry weights that would try a man's strength—lads who are badly fed and badly housed ?

The future outlook for these errand slaves is gloomy indeed. They learn no trade—a grocer's boy does not become a grocer, nor is the boy who is up at five o'clock in the morning carrying round milk cans until nine o'clock, before his school hour begins, ever

likely to become a dairyman. What a little "errander" like this does become is a discontented loafer.

When public opinion is roused in certain directions to the injuries suffered by any special class of the community, there are always some generous hearts willing to provide, as far as in their power lies, some means of relief. This relief most often takes the form of money. Sometimes when a few scores of people have taken upon themselves, with small chance of any thanks for their interference, to voice the wrongs of some abused sections of our citizens, the public, generally through the newspapers, demands a reformation in the conditions. The history of most social reformations reads in the same way, hence the persistent endeavour on the part of social workers to get the evils they are fighting thoroughly well advertised. These workers often suffer contempt and abuse, and a certain amount also of unpopularity, for people who make their neighbours uncomfortable are not beloved. Then this discomfort begins working slowly like a tonic, until the body politic is roused to a healthy interest in matters that concern itself,

and reformation is so urgently demanded that it comes almost automatically.

So long as Englishmen will watch with indifference a tiny child carrying cruel loads through their rich streets, so long as women are insensible of the shivering, white-faced little girls who carry home their goods from the great shops, so long as the public does not realise that they are made to pay from their own purses the price of the ruin of these children—just so long will this blot on our civilisation continue.

CHAPTER III

BELTS

. . . “ Belts, belts, belts, an’ that’s one for you ! ”
An’ it was : “ Belts, belts, belts, an’ that’s done for you ! ”
 O buckle and tongue
 Was the song we sung
 From Harrison’s down to the Park !

RUDYARD KIPLING.

AWAY in those dim regions where the primal forests still hold their secrets, and the defiant rocks guard their golden treasures jealously, there have at times been found by those following in the wake of the most adventurous explorers curious evidences of civilisation.

A story that was told me by a man who had wandered much in the untravelled places of the Dark Continent runs in my mind as I settle myself to write of one of the industries of this highly civilised land of ours.

“ A struggling little caravan, half mad with thirst and dull with despair, stumbled on

towards a great forest which led—heaven knows where! Hardly had they penetrated the dim depths, following on a slight trail which seemed to have been broken out by some determined hand, when they came on a pathetic figure—silent and unrecognisable—a skeleton in mouldering garments. The white trousers were still held in place by a buckled leather belt drawn up to the last hole."

The belt of civilisation has performed many offices in its time, and one well known to wandering men is that of being a hunger-stayer : "Draw in your belts, and march!"

There is, however, not much of the marching spirit left in the poor belt-makers, whose ranks are daily augmented by little children ; and they are so used, these unhappy pilgrims, to little food and much weariness of body, that even the drawing up of the belt could not urge them to greater effort—they work at high pressure. Sometimes, however, in the case of an unruly child whose lawless desires inspire her with a hunger for an hour's rest or a run in the streets, the belt is as effective an instrument of coercion towards a furtherance of her lawful end—which is toil—as the elephant-

driver's iron goad. It is over again the fight of belts against a deadly foe—starvation.

It may be accepted as a universal truth that all home workers are poor, but some are poorer than others. Fashions change, but belts of one sort or another will always be worn. We have not here to deal with the leather bands made in factories for men's wear, but with those lighter and daintier articles which are hung out in every draper's shop to attract lady purchasers. The variety of these things is infinite, but the payment for the making of them seldom varies. A shilling a dozen for elaborate broad elastic belts, which are covered with ribbons and bows, is sometimes paid. For other sorts five farthings per dozen is the remuneration, and for this princely sum the buckle has to be put on, the clasp and slide fixed, and in some cases eyelet-holes pierced and rimmed round.

In poor neighbourhoods where home work is carried on to a large extent, the school inspectors are pretty sharp in the outlook they keep on the children. But no account is taken of the time that these little ones spend before and after school hours in the home workshop.

It is an acknowledged right of parents to require of their offspring such assistance in their daily toil as will enable them to pay the rent of their one miserable room, and to procure such food as will, for the time at least, keep body and soul together. The pitiful lives of these small wage-earners hurt even in the telling, but the reality—God help them! It is more dread than any description could tolerably express.

Would you like to come away from decent streets, from a comfortable room, perhaps from having enjoyed a cleanly served and wholesome meal where food was in abundance, to a home where three of these baby toilers joined with their mother in making elastic belts at five farthings, or perhaps three halfpence per dozen? The ages of these children ranged from eleven to five. The five-year-old helped to stretch the belts and hold them taut. The material is thick, and a fair amount of physical strength is required to push the needle through. The little one also helped to slip on the slides and clasps. I have been there sometimes to watch them at their work. In this case the father is dead. He was a carman engaged to drive

round one of those huge lumbering waggons that carry goods about in London. One day, from the mingled effects of beer and weariness, he tumbled from his perch and was crushed by his own waggon. This was the story the mother told me. There was no emotion about her—the most conventional society beauty could not out-rival these derelicts of humanity in their utter unemotionalism and stolid indifference to concerns around them. The earnings of this family of four amounted to between seven and eight shillings a week, and the rent of their room was half-a-crown. There was but one bed, one three-legged stool, and one old music-stool that was left as a legacy by a lodger whose sole furniture it seemed to have been. An old orange-box held the family wardrobe, and there was a deal table on which the work was piled. Here at long intervals was placed the meagre meal. Look round this English "home," take in the faces of the child workers, and study the face of the woman who brought them into this world of misery—on each is written a tale of callous despair, a weariness that no words could explain. And then the hands—those hands stained with the

dye from the cheap elastic belts which pass through them yard after yard, the nails are worn close to the skin, and the tips of the fingers hardened and marred with the constant thrust of the needle. They all have stooping shoulders and sunken chests.

It is evening time. In happier homes little boys and girls are having the last romp before bed, and these children are gathered round one corner of the table, which is cleared for their last meal. There is tea from the pot which stands on the hob. It is a black decoction ; milk is an unknown luxury, except on rare occasions. The tea is sweetened with brown sugar, and there is part of a stale loaf of adulterated bread. Take it up and break off a piece, and you can see how the alum has affected the flour. Tea and stale bread ! And on this food these small creatures will work until eleven or twelve o'clock. Their working hours average from twelve to fourteen per day. A guttering candle is on the table, and its uncertain flickering flame casts sinister shadows on the serpent-like masses of dark elastic. The tousled hair of the children, the pitiful meanness of their clothes, the hunger in

their faces—all these you see, and when you come stumbling out again you will not be so ready to talk of pauperising the poor and of making England the boasted refuge of all the alien scum of Europe, but you will ask yourself in an agony what you can do for these babies who are born into a slavery as bitter as any suffered by the little negro children, torn from their homes by Arab slave-dealers. Some of these slaves I have seen in the homes of their masters and mistresses. Mentally I compare their condition with that of the child-slaves of England ; and were I compelled to choose I would rather be a slave in a household where food and air are plentiful, and a night's rest comes by right to every occupant, than toil in the fetid air of a filthy city room, sharing an indescribable bed with several other people, and being allowed by a cruel fate so little sleep that the waking hours are full of torture.

In his book on *The Amir and his Country*, Mr. F. A. Martin describes the people thus :

“ They are capricious and revengeful, and turn easily in their likes and dislikes. They are readily led to turn against those to whom

they owe gratitude. . . . In the exercise of their vengeance they are capable of unheard-of cruelty, but"—and here comes the curious characteristic of this ruthless people—"they are kind to their children, denying themselves anything which it is possible to give them, and dressing them in gaudy clothes while they themselves go ragged."

This characteristic has impressed itself on the stranger in their midst, not as an individual characteristic, but rather as a national one. One has to seek for gross cruelty to children, not in heathen lands, but in a Christian country ; and the wrongs of the helpless and oppressed seem greater by contrast of the professions made by a nation of Christians.

However poor and helpless these home workers may be, if the woman is afflicted with a criminal husband all relief and help are refused to her and her children, and the burden and responsibility of life are thrust upon the tender shoulders of the little ones who ought to be learning their lessons at school, or playing in their "out" time, rather than upon those who ought to bear them.

Those of us whose hearts have been wrung

with the sight of suffering children must, however, beware of tirades against existing things. The British as a nation are so slow to move, and, strange as it may seem, from the very people from whom one might expect so much sympathy and help comes a calm ignoring of the present state of affairs. I am neither socialist nor tariff reformer, but it came on me with a dreadful surprise to hear a worker whose knowledge of the poor is considerable deliberately declare that home work and the trade of our own people are not interfered with by the alien hordes who are thrust down upon us. I mentioned the small fact of the three thousand aliens who work in a furniture factory in the East End, and was informed that they work chiefly for the poor. Now, this was a matter that I had gone into very thoroughly ; and one day, while with my husband in one of the large furniture shops of London, where we were choosing a desk that was to be a present to me, the foreman in charge of the department informed us that owing to the tremendous competition of this one firm, and the low price at which they could afford to sell their goods, their own

English firm gave large wholesale orders to these same Jew manufacturers, and where they used to employ in their workshops at least a hundred men, now they employed thirty or forty.

The condition of the slums may, perhaps, be better than it was fifty years ago, but see what Mr. Holmes says of the problem of home workers :

“Strange to say, the condition of the London home workers is practically the same as it was in Hood’s time. . . . The incessant toil and misery of the workers remain as before. Commissions have sat, inquiries have been made, blue books have been filled with evidences, people have wept, philanthropists have poured out their wealth, but all in vain, for the evil is still with us—our sorrow and our shame.”

CHAPTER IV

PUBLIC OPINION AND THE SWEATED INDUSTRIES

THE condition of the home workers and child toilers ought by this time to be public knowledge. Almost every newspaper in the land has given space to the subject during the last few years, and in May 1906 there was opened in London an Exhibition which was called “The Sweated Industries Exhibition.” I went to it five times, as much to watch the people who visited the place and to hear their remarks as to see the workers themselves, with whom, unhappily, I was only too familiar.

One day, while watching a worker at her stall, paying more particular attention perhaps to the visitors who thronged around, I was much interested in a discussion opened by a lady who was very confident that her knowledge of all things on this earth was unquestionable.

She held forth to the unfortunate worker before her on the iniquities of London's poor, their thriftlessness and their extravagance. The woman was naturally very indignant, and I saw the tears come into her eyes as she looked up and said :

“ What do you know about it ? ”

Here lay the whole secret. Poor lady ! With all her grasp of domestic economy, she knew absolutely nothing about it. She insisted that it was the fault of these workers themselves that they had such bad food and such small quantities of it. She said :

“ Why don't you get a pennyworth of bones and make some good soup, instead of wasting your money on buying tea ? ”

Now, the weekly expenditure on tea of most home workers whose wages range from seven to twelve shillings, amounts to perhaps fourpence in the week. To boil water for the infusion of this beverage which with a large optimism they style “ tea,” it is only necessary to use a handful of coal, or the gas-jet for some five minutes. But to make a bowl of soup would require five or six hours' slow cooking. Then soup is not made only with the bones and water. Those

of us who know anything about housekeeping realise the fact that we have a store cupboard which contains herbs, salt and pepper, barley, rice, sago, and such things. We have generally little heaps of vegetables on the cool larder floor, we have lentils and spices—and with the judicious addition of some of these things we can, perhaps, with two pennyworth of bones, make a very nourishing and good soup. But what about the home worker who cannot afford to keep a store cupboard, who cannot have a fire for long, and has only one pot, probably, which serves for all cooking purposes? Would the good lady propose that she should mix the bones and water and drink the liquor neat? Once a friend of mine, being anxious to supply a sick woman in Hoxton with some broth, brought a portion of good beef, provided the herbs and pepper and salt, and took it to the daughter who was employed in a factory. She said :

“ Now, Daisy, will you make some soup for your mother ? ”

“ Oh yes,” said Daisy quite eagerly, “ I know how.”

“ What will you do first ? ” inquired my friend of the enthusiastic little cook.

“ Why, I will put the meat in the frying-pan and pour some water on it and boil it up, and it will be fine ! ”

This was her idea of making soup. On inquiry it was found that there was no other utensil but the frying-pan in the establishment, so the beef tea had to be made elsewhere, and carried in a proper state to the poor invalid.

All workers who are interested in the welfare of girls plead for them to be taught sewing and cooking—two most useful accomplishments. But if these girls are going to start housekeeping on twelve shillings a week for two, and three shillings and sixpence rent to be paid out of that, what fool can expect them to perfect themselves in an art which requires both training and practice ?

The Sweated Industries Exhibition in this country may possibly achieve a desired end, and that is to force a Minimum Wages Bill. This measure already has the sympathy of many wise and eminent men, though of course various pitfalls surround the adventurous folk who would hurry this boon on. A delightful story was told me by a friend the other day with regard to the Minimum Wages Bill.

In Victoria, N.S.W., where this measure is now in force, a rich old Jew has a factory in which he employs both men and girls. When he was in England he was moaning and groaning over his evil fate in having to pay his workers a just wage. He is very rich, but of course the richer a man is the richer he wants to be, especially if he is an employer of labour. This old hypocrite was whining to my friend over a little adventure that had befallen him.

"Our country," he said, "is going to the dogs! Now look here, I will tell you what happened to me.

"A wretched girl came up to my factory one day and asked me, for God's sake, to give her something to do, because she was very poor. I said to her: 'Look here, you are no good to me. You are not strong and you cannot do much work, and I cannot employ you unless I give you a pound a week. So I will give you work and a pound a week, but you must give me back ten shillings.'

"Then," he said, "this bad girl, she went and complained to some one, and I was had up and fined £5; and the worst of it is," he snivelled, "I shall have to pay £100 the next

time I am found out ! Now, isn't that a shame ? "

The same principle of greed is at work unchecked in this country. It would never serve the purpose of the sweaters to have the unfortunate workers put into a position where they could feed themselves well, and house themselves decently, and be well and strong. It would never suit these slave-drivers to have their victims in a condition where they could do without the aid of the children, because labour would then become dearer, and far less work would be done for the same amount of money than is done now. So unless some legal measure can be introduced for protecting the children, their own parents can never be expected to befriend them. I had sent to me recently from Chicago a paper regarding the Chicago Industrial Exhibition, and it runs as follows :—

" THE IMMEDIATE PURPOSE of the Exhibition is to promote the passage and carrying out of legislation now being proposed by local, state, and national administrations. The proposed legislation is as follows :

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“**SWEATED INDUSTRIES** to be regulated by licence which shall be issued only to such families as have a room devoted solely to such work as is ‘taken in,’ and as maintain a fixed standard of sanitary conditions. The contractor or distributor of home work to be responsible for the compliance with these conditions.

“**WOMEN IN INDUSTRY** is the subject of an investigation proposed in a Bill now before the Congress, and strongly recommended by President Roosevelt. It is hoped that this measure will be passed before the Exhibition opens. In this case the Chicago Exhibit will be a part of Chicago’s contribution to this national movement for this much-needed information. If the Bill is not passed by this Congress, the Exhibit will forcefully draw attention to the immediate need of an investigation into this most unknown, but by far from least important, factor in modern industry.

“*Proposed Amendment to Compulsory Education Law of Illinois.*

“If a child is not at work between the ages of fourteen and sixteen, he should be in school.

“ The last school census in Chicago shows more than eight thousand children between the ages of fourteen and sixteen *not* at work, and *not* in school.

“ Illinois needs legislation covering these two years, similar to that already enacted by twenty-two States.’

“ It has been said that the years between fourteen and sixteen are the wasted years of a child’s life. This is the most important question which faces the educational world to-day.’ ”

Besides the Minimum Wages Bill, all those acquainted with the conditions of Home Industries in this country favour the licensing system, which at once places all those private workshops under supervision—that is, of course, supposing that the number of inspectors was sufficient for the work undertaken. In America an immensely strong public opinion has been roused on the matter of Home Work, not altogether, perhaps, from the philanthropic point of view, but from the more selfish one of personal danger. From uninspected homes where articles of wearing apparel and other goods are made under conditions which are dangerous and unhealthy, one may often see

the poison of various diseases carried out and scattered broadcast. I have been into a home where a woman was engaged in making babies' bonnets. Piles of the material were heaped on the bed, in which a little child lay ill with measles. There have been known cases where work was done in rooms occupied by small-pox patients and others suffering from infectious diseases, which are often spread by the means of the work carried from such contaminated places. The Health Officer, of course, is bound to report on any known case, but often before the sufferer has been discovered injury to the public has already been done. So in America the dread of fever and small-pox, and diphtheria and various maladies of that kind, got hold of the people. They roused themselves and demanded an inspection of the houses where home work is undertaken. In certain towns such as Boston, Philadelphia, New York, etc., it is necessary for a home worker who follows his or her trade in a private house to show a licence which certifies that the home is in a clean and good condition, that there are not too many occupants, and that the sanitary conditions are good.

Supposing that any employer gives out to a person who has not this licence work which is done in an unsuitable place in dangerous conditions, it is not the worker who is punished, but the employer. The enforcement of such a law in this country would be the beginning of better things for our poor, evilly housed home workers.

I have seen it advocated in the public press that there should be a Municipal Labour Bureau in every parish, and this would have the power of advancing money to workers for the purchase of boots and clothes for the children, the same to be deducted from wages, which would also be State-regulated.

Further, it has been proposed that the State should concern itself with the children, that every child should be compelled to learn some trade, and that the apprentice system should be put in force again. If this become possible, the number of unemployed would cease, and the children, instead of being put to unprofitable toil at an unseemly early age, would be allowed to go on with their schooling, and then given a start in life which would make them, in time, good wage-earners.

CHAPTER V

THE CRAFT OF THE NEEDLE

“MRS. JENNINGS,” I said, standing at an equal distance between the door and the bed, for reasons which need not be enlarged upon, “Why did you marry?”

The question was torn from me by the circumstances in which I found this victim of the unholy saying which has passed into a proverb—“Men must work and women must weep.”

Mrs. Jennings looked up at me in rather a dazed fashion.

“Why did I marry?” she repeated. “Lord knows, miss. It 'appens to most women wot don't look out.”

“Where is your husband now?”

“Lord knows, miss.”

Mrs. Jennings was reduced to hopeless tears.

Not that the overburdened and sweated workers of our magnanimous city are much given to tears—they weep as little as the men work. But a terrible misfortune had overtaken this distressed mortal. She was the mother of five children. In years she was not more than thirty-five, in sorrow and misery bowed down and aged. For three days in a week she had successfully kept back two of the youngest children from school. One of these was six, and the other not quite eight years old. The eldest boy had run away from home ; his mother had no idea where he had gone. As the lad had earned about two shillings a week running errands, his father, with amiable feeling, had threatened to break every bone in his body when he should return to that divine institution which the public called his “home.” In the meantime this anxious father studied his whereabouts by an occult process of gazing into the bottom of a beer mug in various public-houses.

Of the other four children, two were already at work, and two at school, when they could be spared by their mother. But to-day the inspector had come in, and finding the children busily engaged in sewing on buttons where

a tiny white spot of chalk marked the exact locality on the waistcoats sewn by their mother, he rowed the woman, threatening her with the Law. So the little ones had been sent off to school. Thus began the morning, but a worse fate was yet in store, for while Mrs. Jennings grumbled and spun the wheel of her machine swiftly round, in came the agent from the shop where it had been hired. Mrs. Jennings was behindhand with the rent, so the man took the machine away. The wretched waistcoat-maker had already paid more than half the purchase money, but for such as she there is no redress. The agreement she had with the firm stated that unpunctuality of payment rendered her liable to forfeit the machine without recourse to legal action.

There were waistcoats everywhere ; piles of them, and Mrs. Jennings earned from 7s. 6d. to 9s. 3d. per dozen for them. Out of this lordly sum she had to buy the cotton for sewing the waistcoats and the silk for making the button-holes. This cost, perhaps, a shilling for each dozen. Each waistcoat took three hours to make ; but with the children helping her to sew on the buttons, and

thread the needles with silk for the button-holes, she could finish one in less time.

The whole burden of providing food for these little mouths rested on this dismal-looking woman.

“What good,” said she to me bitterly, “does this schooling do the kids? I ’ad precious little, and they ain’t likely to be any better off nor me! Is it better to be ’ungr y or to be hignorant?”

I fended the question by asking another.

“How do you expect to get your machine back, Mrs. Jennings?”

“I’ll go an’ talk to the boss,” she said wearily. “It means two or three hours gone from work. The kids will come in and there ain’t a bite for ’em. ’E may let me have it if I pay two shillings down extry when the work is done.”

“How long will it take you to finish this lot of waistcoats?” I asked.

“Lord knows,” she said; “I’ve wasted time enough already.” The tears began to flow again, and presently two small mortals crept in, from school. It was the dinner hour.

“Mammy,” said the little one, “don’t cry.

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'E won't come again for a long time. I'll 'elp yer."

Poor baby ! But the woman wept on. Then she rose, and stretching out her hand for a ridiculous black bonnet that hung from a peg, she arranged it on her head and prepared to go out.

"I'll be back as soon as 'e'll let me," she said to the children ; "better run back to school when it's time."

"Mammy," said the small one, evidently the pet, "ain't there a bit of bread ? "

Mrs. Jennings made no reply, and the child did not press the question.

The elder child, who had been working since 5.30 that morning, flung himself down on the bed. When Mrs. Jennings was halfway down the stairs I arranged that the children should go on a foraging expedition, and provide themselves with such food as the neighbourhood could produce for sixpence. Later I learned how the money had been disbursed. Then I ran down after Mrs. Jennings.

"Mrs. Jennings," I said, "I will come along with you to the machine man ; but I must have a bite of something first. Will you come and get a cup of coffee ? "

So we went into one of the miserable little food shops commonly to be found in such squalid districts, and Mrs. Jennings was fortified for her long walk to the agent's. It took us three-quarters of an hour to reach the place. The agent himself saw us. Mrs. Jennings explained her errand.

"You can go to hell!" he said politely.
"You shan't have the machine back."

Sometimes in the course of my life I have longed, with a desire that has been almost agony, to be a man, possessing a strong man's physical advantages and a thoroughly good pair of fists. Being a woman and defenceless, it was not possible to injure the brute who was tormenting this helpless woman, and incidentally helping to starve a couple of little children.

"How much money has this woman paid you on that machine?" I asked.

"That ain't none o' your business," he said.
"Pardon me," I replied as quietly as I could, "I intend to make it my business."

Mrs. Jennings nudged me.

"Don't rile 'im," she said, "it ain't no good."

"You ain't going to 'ave the machine, so

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you'd best clear out, both of you," said this amiable man.

"On the contrary," I said, "Mrs. Jennings is going to pay you this very minute the arrears due on her machine ; and unless you allow her to take it away, I shall go and ask the nearest policeman to take you up for trespass and illegally removing this woman's property."

The man was in such a rage that he could hardly find words to speak. I had no idea how far I myself was trespassing, or what the law allowed me to do in such a case, but the circumstances were so desperate that I thought bluff was justified. I worked on the very safe supposition that men of the agent's sort have, as a rule, such a shady career that the one thing they dread is any publicity given to their business, or any interference by the police.

Mrs. Jennings and I bore the machine back in triumph. It was only a cheap chain-stitch one. The principle of a chain-stitch machine is that work done with it lasts only a short time. One of the stitches gives way, and out comes the whole seam. The stuff the garment is made of is generally shoddy, so the edges fray, and it is almost impossible to put

it together again. By this trickery the shop-keeper who sells these cheap ready-made waist-coats scores, but the woman who makes them receives no more for the rapidly multiplying work.

When we got back the children were in. The small one was sitting on the work-table, the only one in the room ; the other was standing on his head in the middle of the bed, and in that position he was receiving into his wide-open mouth chips of stale bun, which the younger one was aiming at him. He erected himself as we entered. Mrs. Jennings was in too seraphic a frame of mind to threaten him with a thrashing, as on another occasion she might possibly have done ; so I got them to tell me how they had spent their sixpence.

The little chap patted himself about the middle complacently. He stuck out in a somewhat lumpy manner.

“ We got a 'eap of grub,” he said—“ rare good grub ! ” and unbuttoning his weather-worn coat, he drew forth from their sanctuary next to his person two large buns, with the dried currants looking like dead flies stuck over them. When I examined them closely

I found that in this case appearances were not altogether deceptive, for there were as many dead flies as currants. They must have been several days old, and were certainly very hard. But the children were in ecstasies with them.

“How much did they cost?” I asked.

“Two for a ha’penny—we ’ave eat two, and we ’ave got two left.”

“That makes a penny; what else did you get?” I asked.

The elder child got under the bed, and from there produced sundry little packages. There was a quarter of a pound of tea, costing fourpence. It was not really tea, or rather, it had been tea, but in the excessively poor shops there may be obtained by economical buyers a kind of dried tea-leaf which has already served its purpose once in worthier homes. There was also a small parcel of sugar, and — what do you think? A great hunk of stale cake. Mrs. Jennings was distinctly vexed.

“Waste, I calls it,” she said. “But never mind, it ain’t often yer gets the charnst.”

I departed from that home, and as I went

I recalled sundry lectures I had heard on hygiene and proper feeding. I knew that these little children would be hard at work again, toiling probably far into the night, and then I thought of the food which they had chosen to sustain their bodies.

The little ones were up before the dawn "helping mother." The room had to be put into some sort of order, not that it was ever clean and wholesome—indeed, at any time I made my appearance there I stood as far from contact with bed or table as the small space permitted ; but even the greatest economist in housekeeping must at least straighten the bed, light a fire, and get some food prepared. In all these things the children took their part, and so their lives went on. The little fingers bore many a needle-thrust, the teeth were dented with continually biting off the slack when the buttons were sewn on. The young backs were bent and the child-eyes screwed into small slits to get the dark work better into focus. Once you become familiar with the type, you can pick such children out anywhere.

Mrs. Jennings and most of her class obtain

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their work already cut out from foreign workshops. These in their turn sell it to the large shops, either in the West End or in the City. One thing may be said in exoneration of the public from these crimes of sweating the children, and that is, that they do not pay very much less for their garments than they would were these same clothes manufactured under proper conditions. Sweating is the outcome of that devilish greed which makes each person through whose hands the work goes eager to wring as large a profit out of it as possible. The sweating is also due to the tremendous alien competition ; and if the public would but realise that they themselves have to pay a very heavy price for these evils, they would soon add their voices to the cry of "Reform !"

It is especially in this matter of clothing that we ordinary people have to pay the nation's debt for its prodigal hospitality. Many people give no heed as to where their clothes are made so long as they are completed to their satisfaction. But knowing something of the hideous conditions obtaining in sweating

shops, I have made a violent effort to employ only English workmen, and this is my latest experience.

I went into a tailor's shop which looked clean and respectable, and seeing the proprietor, who was an Englishman, I asked him whether he had his own workers and his own workshop. He assured me that he had a sanitary workshop, and employed only his own workmen. He named his own price for making up my material into a costume for me. I supplied all the goods excepting the lining for the skirt, which he was to provide. He took my measurements himself. When I went to be fitted, the garment was tried on me by a miserable-looking foreigner, who could hardly speak a word of English. It was too late then to make any fuss about the matter, and my costume was sent home so absolutely ruined and so disgracefully put together that I shall never be able to wear it. This is an experience which is not mine alone. Almost all tailors now send out their orders to be done in sweating-shops in the city ; and unless one can afford to go to those dressmakers who charge fabulous prices, there is not the faintest hope

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of ever getting a garment decently made by English workpeople.

In the homes where the children have to work hardest for the least pay, the influence of the foreign sweater can be seen in its vilest aspect, and it is only a poetic justice which makes some of us of the better classes suffer in our pockets for this national crime of encouraging sweated industries.

CHAPTER VI

THE LITTLE MOTHER

ANY book dealing with the burdens of children would be incomplete without a picture of the "little mothers" of England. Once when I was out walking with a dear friend in the country, we were discussing the matter of children. It was before the days when my knowledge of them was intimate, and I regretted my lack of the mother instinct which my friend seemed to possess. Being the baby at home, and having been much petted in childhood, it has always seemed to me a misfortune for a girl to be born into a family where she has to undertake the mother's duties ere she has left her childhood behind. As we passed through the little village, my friend stopped here and there to greet a shy urchin, or exchange a word with a demure little maid

coming from school. The love of children and the mother instinct seemed strong in her, as it is in many women, and so I was the more surprised when she said to me :

“ Love for children, I think, is a thing that comes by practice. I belong to a family of thirteen, and I really married to get out of always carrying about babies. But my freedom did not last long, for my own children came thick and fast, and, strange to say, I have not regretted them.”

Of course no decent woman regrets her children ; but even now, with all the compassion and pity I have for little ones, I find it in my heart to be very sorry for those small mortals who take up the cares of motherhood while they are yet babies.

In the poorer neighbourhoods of almost all great cities swarming crowds of children may be seen morning and evening in the narrow streets. In London the slum districts are characterised by the crowds of children scattered about. Among the working class—by this expression I mean to distinguish the labourers' wives from the sweated workers, who are a class by themselves—the little girls of a

family are almost invariably made the child-mothers of the younger children.

In Battersea Park one hot summer's day I met two small maidens aged about ten years, each wheeling a rickety perambulator. Two babies were planted in each, one an infant and the other an older child. The little girls chose a spot under a tree, and then, lifting out the larger children from the prams, they settled themselves on a seat, each with a foot on the wheel, and so they kept the little carriages in motion while the babies slept. The two toddling ones disported themselves on the grass, and when they escaped too far one of the girls would leave her charge and scamper after them. I sat down on the bench beside these two children and talked to them for a while, and elicited the fact that the mother of one was out charing and would not be home until six that evening, and the mother of the other was visiting friends—which meant, I suppose, that she was gossiping in the nearest public-house. The children appeared badly fed, and were very poorly clothed.

“ My dad's a carpenter,” one of them told me, “ and 'e gets thirty shillings a week. 'E

give me a sixpence last week, 'e did." But the other child's father appeared to have no definite employment, and her mother, she told me, got drunk often.

Yet the fate of these children, bad as it was, seemed comparatively easy and luxurious, since they were able to walk in the Park and enjoy the air, whereas the babies of the home workers, and of the poorest poor, have none of these attractions—their playground is the street. Such streets, too!—full of garbage and filth, and always reeking with the smell of fish and flesh, of beer and decaying vegetables.

Lately a London daily paper has published a series of articles under the title "The Cry of the Children," depicting scenes in London public-houses. These scenes are not newly enacted, nor are they in any way unfamiliar to those of us who go down into the inferno. But bad as the public-house is—the mother indeed of most of the evils which fling men and women into the hell of despair—yet there are evils which are more hideous, and these may not be spoken of plainly or freely. These hideous things, too, all who work among the poor know.

The baby girls in some of the slums of London have laid upon them early all the burdens which their parents can foist upon their poor little shoulders.

The story of one small mother comes to me as I write. She was a little red-haired girl who was called "Carrots" in the street and "Nellie" in the room where her family lived. The last addition to this family was twins. The mother worked in a factory, bringing home each evening as much work as she could possibly finish with the help of some of her children. The father also worked at irregular intervals in a tin-box factory. Their wages between them amounted to twenty shillings or twenty-five shillings per week, and there were seven children. In this case both mother and father drank, and it fell to poor little red-headed Nellie to keep the home together. There was not even a "pram" for the twins. So from somewhere this ingenious child had got an old fruit-box on four wooden wheels. There was a hole in it, through which a cord was passed, and into this the twins were packed occasionally, and Nellie took them out for an airing, which was combined with running errands for the neighbours, who

paid her a farthing or so for each. Nellie was about eleven years old, and ought to have been in school ; but her parents swore she was fifteen, and, as they had moved several times from one locality to another, the child had somehow come to be exempt from further education. The live-long day this little girl had to look after her brothers and sisters and take entire charge of the babies. I marvel much that any of them lived, having now a personal experience of babies and their many needs. The instinct of motherhood must have been strong in poor Nellie, for she knew that babies need milk, and the problem of securing this milk was a terrible one with her. The other children fought and scrambled for the food which came their way, not regularly nor in reasonable quantities, but occasionally. This heroic little girl with the farthings she earned bought, in a miserable little shop in their street, a white and chalky-looking mixture which in that neighbourhood was called milk. She was very proud of her babies. They took their nourishment out of a feeding-bottle with a long rubber tube.

I have heard many tirades against the upper classes for neglecting their children. Artificial

feeding has been raved against by doctor and clergyman alike all over the country, but these people provide good nurses for their children. They get the best milk that can be obtained—it is difficult to accomplish this in London, I admit, but it may be done with considerable trouble. And yet we are told that these children die ! Now, what of the slum children ? Of course they die too, but considering all things one need not be so sorry for them ; the ones that live are more to be pitied.

The hard case of Jane D—— was told me by a worker in the Ragged School Union. She is an underfed, tiny slip of a girl of fifteen, whose mother takes in work from a warehouse. Her whole day is spent as a warehouse girl—she generally goes to her work in the morning with no breakfast inside her. On her return she has to do all the housework and see to the children, after which she helps her mother (who is a hard, cruel woman) at her work until midnight or later. There seems to be always a baby in this family, and Jane is never seen without a child in her arms. Her only pleasure is when she once a week brings her little crippled brother to the Cripples' Parlour,

but even here she still has the baby in her arms, and she is never seen to smile.

Here and there one meets a little girl or boy carrying a baby, and easing the burden from time to time by changing the position. These little burden-bearers are generally crooked, and bear in their persons the indelible stamp of their slavery. It must be an awful problem for those who have any love for children or any affection in their hearts, to devise some way by which these little ones may be rescued and saved from their slavery. It has been amply proved that school inspectors and the School Board system are absolutely inadequate for the task. Some other force must be brought into play. To take these children away from their parents and care for them would merely mean that others of their sort would be flung on the world, and the parents would divest themselves of all responsibility. To forbid children under a certain age to take the duties of housekeeping for an entire family, or the sole charge of babies, would be to lay an additional burden, perhaps, on a woman already labouring under many disabilities. Sometimes children from the worst of the slums who have borne the brunt of their

parents' sin, and have become criminals and desperadoes, have been rescued by philanthropic societies like the Salvation Army and Dr. Barnardo's Homes. Here you will find them—the wronged, the incorrigible, the hopeless—turn presently into quite promising little citizens.

I want to show you in a little picture an extraordinary mission of this kind, which I will call "The Mission of the Doll."

Away in Clapton, set back from the road with grass and trees around it, is a house, and the gate of this house bears a legend—"THE NEST." You must go through this place to see what wisdom and love can accomplish—this with the addition of very little money.

We passed first through the rooms where the children live. In this one they eat; in this dormitory they sleep; and here they are taught. All is clean and neat and sweet. And now come out into the garden and look at the children twinkling about on the green, soft grass, with their little white feet, for they wear no shoes. Their hair is brushed neatly away from the forehead and they wear clean

pinafores. They are of all ages up to some fifteen years or so, and they are playing about merrily. Let us sit down under this tree for a while and hear the stories of some of them. All of these began by being baby toilers, baby mothers some, little home-slaves others, until they degenerated into vice. And others have been victims of the vilest wrong that can be done to a child—victims of drunken and criminal fathers. Some are marked and bruised by drunken mothers. Some have been charged at the police courts as being incorrigible, and some of them have run away from their homes. But look at them now ! There is a girl with a doll in her arms, and this she furtively kisses and cuddles with a divine rapture. Every girl has her doll.

Some have been thieves, all are acquainted with sin ; but here they are brought together, and the one word they hear is "Forget." They are surrounded by loving friends and they are loved back into childhood—these little mortals who have never had any childhood. Some of them danced, and they had music —what would you think of that music, I wonder? To me it seemed sweet, for I have

never known slum children make music. They cry, they curse sometimes, at others they are silent, but they do not make much music. Yet here in this home these wonderful children, who are born again, so to speak, each had a toilet comb with a slip of paper across it, and on this they buzzed out merry tunes. The Institution does not run to expensive musical instruments, but one could hardly have found any to better suit childhood's wants.

The children are never punished in the Nest—the thing there is for one to be good ; and it is wonderful how the children succumb to the fashion—this feminine weakness is universal throughout the world.

I only know of one such home, and this Mrs. Booth has founded. I would there were many such where the children might learn motherhood without paying the penalty of toil at six years old.

CHAPTER VII

“THE INFERNOS”

THE gas-lights were suddenly turned up in the hall crowded from floor to ceiling, and presently, led by the chairman, there stepped on to the platform a band of workers, representing several missionary societies, whose labours had taken them thousands of miles away to heathen lands, there to preach the Gospel of gentleness and humanity.

They spoke well, most of them, being full of their subject; and through the hall there rang groans and cries of “Shame,” as the travellers from distant lands told of the ills that heathenism wreaks on its victims. There was the pathetic story of the little girl in China whose feet were bandaged so tightly that she was unable to sleep at night, and wept with the pain; there was the gaunt, sallow-faced missionary from some remote

station in India telling in passionate language of the little child-wives; and then a godly and virtuous woman spoke of the shame of the women of Japan.

By my side sat an infidel and a socialist—one who knew the people of this country like a book, who had the heart of a child and the generosity of a king. By-and-by we passed out with the multitude, who, having been thrilled to their finger-tips, emptied their purses for the good of those that sit in darkness. At a friend's house we met two of the travellers, and entered into conversation with them.

“But you,” said one of them, turning to me, “surely you know that the sins committed under the cloak of heathenism are not dreamt of in any Christian country.”

I was silent. Again she urged the question.

“Do you not feel it your duty to bear witness, to help the cause of Christ in foreign lands?”

Then I spoke.

“We must each of us do what seems right to his own conscience. I have, as you know, not only travelled, but lived in heathen lands;

and if you would really know things as they are and seek the truth, come with me and my friend, and we will take you to the gates of hell, and these lie hard by us now."

So for the sake of proof, and to still our unbelieving tongues, the man and the woman agreed to walk with us when the lights of London shot far out into the sky, and the happy people of this land gather themselves into their homes, saying complacently, "How good we are!"

Before we set forth we arrayed ourselves in inoffensive garments, for we sought to attract as little notice as possible. The infidel walked somewhat ahead, with a bitter smile on his lips. Swiftly, from wide, well-lighted streets, we turned into a poorer quarter of the town. Then, lying between two lines of light, we saw one of those strong bridges that span the slow-flowing river, and threading our way through the traffic we passed over to a populous and poor neighbourhood. It was a Saturday night. In the West End several of the theatres we had passed had outside those opulent-looking boards on which fat letters proclaimed "HOUSE FULL." The great

restaurants were doing a thriving trade, and so in the slum district where we found ourselves the public-houses were at their golden hour.

“How dreadful this is!” gasped the missionary woman, as the mob pushed past, almost depositing her in the gutter as they went.

The man in front walked grimly on, saying nothing. Then suddenly he turned and halted.

“If you have not been in these places before you will probably find them a revelation. But now you are here I mean that you shall see as much as possible. There are no cabs to be had, and if you lose sight of me, as you do not know the locality, you will probably be knocked on the head and robbed.”

Our companions were visibly distressed.

“You are all right so long as you don’t say anything, and keep close to me.”

I turned my head away to hide a smile, for I knew the place well; and though it bears no fair repute, there is, early in the night, not usually much danger of physical violence to people who mind their own business—the danger comes later.

“What very nasty people!” ejaculated the

lady, as a shouting group of young women passed on their way to one of the public-houses. We penetrated deeper into this sordid region, thick with struggling humanity—men and women and little children. So we came to a narrow street. A public-house was at the entrance, and to help the traveller to reach the one at the end there were two inns by the way, reminiscent not of good cheer and country freshness, but smelling vilely of beer and stale spirits and tobacco. The wicked man who led us made straight for the first public-house, and the man of God who followed marched steadily after him until he really grasped his intention.

“Not in there, surely,” he said, halting outside, and the woman clutched my arm.

But the bad man was resolute. “Thousands of good Christians pass their time in these places,” he said genially. “There can be no harm in your joining some of your fellow creatures for ten minutes.”

Just then the door flew open and a babel of sound came volleying forth. Hideous words, uncouth jests, the cries of frightened children, and the high-strung voice of some

woman passing over the border of sanity—yet through that door went the bad man. Our two companions were gently compelled to enter, and I followed last. Coming in from the street, the atmosphere of the room seemed intolerable. The floor was strewn with sawdust, worked into a horrid puddle with spillings of drink and the expectorations of the crowd.

There was a sudden cry, and the next thing I saw was that a man had grabbed up a baby who had fallen on the floor, and perched him on his shoulder to be out of the writhing mass of humanity.

“Will yer like this blamed kid?” he cried, raising his voice.

A coarse, red-faced woman butted her way through the crowd, and, snatching the child down, cuffed it well about the ears.

Another woman standing by said, “Lord, don’t ‘it it,” and she took the baby and gave it a drink from her own glass.

So busy was this hideous throng drinking and blaspheming that we stood unnoticed, and the two whose eyes and ears heathenism had not inured to such sights swiftly slipped out of the door. We followed also.

"Take us back," they pleaded. "This is awful."

"Not yet, not yet," said our guide cheerfully. "You haven't seen anything of London life yet. The best is to come."

So we went farther on and stood outside another public-house, watching the women and children enter. They went in by the score, and outside in the street round the door thronged dozens of small girls and boys who had in their charge younger children, some babies in arms, waiting for their parents who were finishing up their Saturday night's shopping with a visit to the dram-house. Sometimes an indulgent parent would struggle to the door and call "Tommy" or "Tilly," and an eager youngster would press forward to get a gulp from a beer-mug, or a drain of gin.

"Come in," said the bad man graciously, but our companions held back.

"Very nice people," he said. "All English—members of the highest civilisation in the world, examples of what good legislation, powerful Christianity, and advancing science can do for a nation."

As he finished a man and woman came out. There had been some disagreement, and this lord of creation took his mate by the throat and shoved her down in the gutter on the other side of the road ; then he proceeded to kick her. The woman was in a condition which would render it particularly dangerous for her to be violently treated, but the public-house does not foster pathological knowledge. The missionary was for remonstrating.

“ Don’t,” said the bad man ; “ the probability is that you would get a whole posse of hooligans round you ; it is a way they have in this country.”

Then as we went he murmured softly :

“ I remember reading an account by a great traveller of some of the customs in heathen lands, and was struck by the fact that even savage races are known to hold in some consideration and reverence a woman about to become a mother. You see we rise superior to these superstitions in this enlightened place.”

“ It should be stopped, it should be stopped,” murmured the two as they ambled helplessly along. “ Public-houses should be closed,” they reiterated.

We took no notice, but hustled them along to another "boozier."

"Are there no policemen here?" asked the lady nervously.

"Sure not to be," I said soothingly.

There were sounds of revelry from within the brightly lighted saloon—such sounds as might have frozen the blood; the oaths came thick and fast, tossed in with obscene witticisms, and mingling with all the foul words the Divine names were hurled curse-wise through the conversation.

Here and there were children, living illustrations of what the dram-shop does for England's little ones—puny, miserable things with rickety limbs and distorted faces.

"Oh!" said the woman, stopping, "I have seen enough, let us go."

"Wait," said the infidel sternly, "the children of hell are about to pass."

It was near closing time, and these fearful people came forth from the reeking den. A little boy staggered out with the throng. He was dancing and singing—"Jesus, Jesus." A woman was yelling inarticulately and came rushing up to him. As she grabbed the

drunken child she reeled and fell across the kerb-stone, cutting her head open, and the blood splashed over her son. When we turned, our friends were gone.

We walked slowly away from the gates of hell, and by-and-by we met the two hurrying madly on. The man was muttering something that sounded not good, and the woman was saying :

“ But the children, the little children—it is horrible, horrible.”

Then as we gained the bridge again the man who had gone to preach the Gospel of Christ to souls thousands of miles away said :

“ Is there no one to care? is there no one strong enough to raise a voice against such iniquity ? ” Then his voice broke, and he said :

“ But it is worst for the children. Will no one do anything for the children ? ”

CHAPTER VIII

THE MANGLE

A MORE appropriate name could hardly be found for the hideous machine which has become the torment and goad of many little children in the under-world of London. In many of the dens where mangling is carried on it is unusual even to place a card to that effect in the window, though one may often see the little sign "Mangling done here" showing through some blurred window-pane in the myriads of mean streets which go to make up the world's greatest capital. My knowledge of this unseemly trade among children came about in this wise.

There was Florrie, a club girl, who on show nights was apt to distinguish herself by her elocutionary brilliance, and it was down Hoxton way she lived. My friend, the President of this same club, had made a party to which all

the girls were invited, and Florrie among them. But the news came to her that the girl could not come.

“Florrie 'asn't no clothes, an' she can't borrer none ! ”

Such was the information vouchsafed. Here indeed was a dilemma. Off went my friend to see the child.

In distant lands one hears romantic stories of the happy homes of England, and certainly in travelling through this blessed country which for so long has been free from war, pestilence, and famine, one sees with admiration the lovely lands lying peacefully to right and left. There nestle little villages in snug valleys, and here and there proud towns throw skywards their spires and turrets, and many a stream flows gently to the sea. Thus, on the face of it, beauty and peace seem to reign in the land. The disillusioning begins when one passes from the ranks of the well-to-do, the smugly prosperous, and injudiciously makes investigations among the great mass of the people. It is only when one's eyes are cleared of the glamour of pride and wealth that one sees how things are indeed in England now.

This typical "home" I would like you to see is a little hovel opening straight on to a murky, unpaved street. A place with a battered window and scarce room enough to turn round in, but the only "home" of a cheery, hard-working little English girl and her two old grandparents whom she supports with her labour.

My friend entered this abode somewhat suddenly one noontide, almost tumbling from the street into the room; but seeing a toothless old man grubbing horribly in a basin among some strange-looking food, she was about to withdraw apologising for intruding at the dinner hour.

"Oh," said Florrie, "please come in; it's only grandfather 'avin' a bite, an' we're just takin' a cup of tea. Of course, we don't 'ave dinner hevery day."

There were two cups of milkless tea set before the old grandmother and Florrie, and they munched away contentedly at crusts of dry bread—and for such meagre fare the girl had been at work since half-past five that morning, and would resume her toil after a short interval to carry it on far into the night.

Mangling is an art which one might say ought to be cultivated without regard to such sordid considerations as filthy lucre—"Art for Art's sake!" It requires some little skill and practice to feed that grim iron-mouthed monster. The clothes must be folded evenly and placed carefully within the jaws, and then with a mighty effort and pull, into which the whole force of the body is thrown, round go the wheels and out come the folded articles—but each turn is a wrench for the delicate body of the mangle. Florrie was squat and ungainly, but she carried on her work with the utmost cheerfulness. The rate of payment for mangling articles is a penny a dozen, and a smart worker can earn threepence an hour. But this implies a large amount of physical strength, and to eke out an existence means uncounted hours of toil.

When we asked Florrie why she chose to support these two old people instead of allowing them to go to the workhouse, she gave her reasons with charming simplicity.

"Well, yer see, miss, grandfather 'e wouldn't work when 'e ought ter 'ave, and o' course now 'e can't; and poor old grannie, well,

'oo'd 'ave the 'eart to send the old soul to the big 'ouse? It 'ud fair kill 'er."

So she toiled on. She appeared at the party, however, resplendent in grannie's blouse, the only one the old lady possessed, so she had to be put to bed before the hour of the party. Florrie washed the garment and made it smart for her own wear. Then a neighbour, hearing of her plight, came in and lent her a skirt; thus with the contribution of a hat and belt and a surprise gift of a pair of shoes from a friend, Florrie arrived hilarious. She might have been living on truffles and champagne, her spirits were so light, and she recited "Christmas Day in the Workhouse" with appropriate fervour. She went home with bags of cakes and buns, and a small basket of "sundries," which included tea and sugar and various domestic articles; yet with all her toil she had a fairer time than her child neighbours, —the fate of these is indeed fearful.

In many of the poorer streets of our great cities are tenement houses where the poor live herded together in indecent numbers. The rent of these places in London rises year by year as the alien blood-sucker comes in and,

with that curious faculty which these people possess, gathers together bits of property here and there. They scrimp and screw, and cheat and grind the bodies and souls of their poorer neighbours. By all manner of subtle tricks they rob their unfortunate victims of almost all they possess, and so by slow yet sure degrees they obtain the houses which have sheltered our own people for years. Immediately on acquiring these properties the alien landlord begins a system of what is practically blackmail. He threatens the tenants with all manner of impositions, and finally raises their rent, knowing that they must either pay him what he asks or go to the workhouse. So profitable is the landlord business among the poor that it has in many localities come to be monopolised by the alien vampires in our midst.

There were in 1906, 385,835 aliens, born abroad, who were settled in this country ; how many more have come in since that time, one need not trouble to discuss. But while they prosper and their children reap the benefit of our schools and hospitals, our own children are thrust into slavery because of these strangers

whom we let loose upon them. The creation of new slums is alarmingly rapid. There are three hundred thousand "one-room" dwellers in London—that is to say, all the families represented by this enormous number occupy, each family, but one room; and for these rooms the rent charged brings in tremendous profits to the owners. To meet the heavy burdens laid upon them, it becomes absolutely necessary for the people to transgress the law, so in many of these rooms home work is carried on, much of it *sub rosa*. The children of these submerged families must add their mite to the general income, and the babies toil to pay the house rent, and earn part, at any rate, of their own food. In many and many a corner of such rooms a mangle may be found, and at this dreary machine from dawn to dark little children toil, earning with infinite labour perhaps a penny an hour. The little backs are bent, the arms grow twisted, and terrible eye-strain results, for the tremendous muscular force put forth by these tiny bodies causes the eyes to protrude. If there are too many absences from school the inspector comes round, and the little ones are packed off with

aching bodies and dull eyes to pick up such knowledge as they can. But almost to the hour of starting for school, and again on their return for many hours, they take their turn at the mangle.

The terrible contrast between the children of the aliens in our midst and our own young Englanders is an awful indictment against those who, having knowledge of the conditions in our towns, go blindly on from day to day without making an effort to combat the evils drinking at the heart of our national life.

If you go into any of the areas which have been monopolised by Jews and aliens you will find an air of prosperity about them, and a very noticeable fact is that the children are, for the most part, well cared for. The aliens may have criminal tendencies, and they trade on the immorality of others, but they keep themselves remarkably free from the vices which overpower our poor and working population. Alien mothers and fathers do not as a rule drink, and if in the early days of their coming to this country they crowd into insanitary and filthy rooms, they only do so until they have learnt enough to take ad-

vantage of their neighbours and the good things which this country provides for them. They prosper and succeed, but the thriftless and drink-ridden Britishers sink lower and lower, ready victims of any enterprising foreigner who chances on them.

I do not wish to lay more sins on these miserable strangers than is their due, yet most trades suffer through them, and it is because of their presence and their usurping the houses in poor neighbourhoods that rents are so enormously increased, in London at any rate ; but so far as mangling is concerned, their influence on this mean industry is only indirect.

Mangling is done for the neighbours, and the rate of payment is the same everywhere. The children are set to this form of toil in many instances because their parents are idle and drunken. I have before been accused of exposing evils and raising difficulties without suggesting any methods of reform. But it must be borne in mind that many earnest people are engaged in discussing these subjects, and though their experience is immensely superior to mine, they are not able,

evidently, to suggest reforms that commend themselves to our legislators. Socialism is rampant in this country, and surely no one need wonder at this? Yet one views its progress with feelings of grave alarm, for any one who has lived and worked among the poor knows how futile it is to hope to revolutionise their condition merely by the abuse and taxation of the rich. How about the vested interests that must not be interfered with? The pandering to powerful foreign financiers in our midst? Who shall say, "Forbid the working woman to enter a public-house, and make it obligatory for every man to support his own children"? The socialist would reply to this—"You cannot rob the people of their freedom; and if a rich woman is allowed to drink unchecked, why should you deprive the poor of their one joy?"

The reason is simple enough: rich women do not call on their neighbours to pay their drinking bills; poor women inevitably do, for we have to support their children and keep them in their old age in the workhouses. We are responsible for their imbecile and crippled

offspring ; therefore the vested interest of the publican, and the fictitious freedom of the father and mother, ought to be nothing in consideration against the charge which these drunken people are to the nation, and the fearful loss to national efficiency which is caused by the ruthless slavery to which they subject their children, and the hideous cruelties which they wreak on these innocent victims.

CHAPTER IX

CRIMINAL CHARITY

We live so hemmed about by conventions and prejudices in these days that few people can either dare or afford to tell the truth about things; especially if, as is the case with charity, popular prejudice is against any practical suggestion. In the matter of fashionable or common evils there seems to be a conspiracy of silence. The other day I was asked by the editor of a lady's magazine to write an article on "Bought Beauty." I wrote the article, and gave a few facts about the beauty trade in this country and America. The editor called on me in a panic.

"Mrs. Mackirdy," he said, "I know that all you say is true, and I would give six months' salary to be able to afford to publish it, but it would cost us £400 a year to do so. We should lose all our advertisements from the quacks you expose."

I sent the article to five great journals, and in each case the editor wrote to me personally, saying how much he wished he "dared" publish the article as it stood, but the consequences would be so expensive that the business of an exposure of one of the biggest frauds of the day could not be afforded by any English magazine!

As for the matter of charity, the press and the pulpit seem tied. There are so many thousands of influential people personally benefited by "charity" that no one dares to say a word against the absurd and wicked waste of public money that goes on in this country. Lately one preacher in Westminster Abbey dared to express a sensible solution for this fearful problem of philanthropy. Canon Barnett has a world-wide reputation as a social worker, and knows what he is talking about. Charity in this country does not make for national welfare. There is no justice in its administration, and hardly even a moiety of wisdom. We make paupers and criminals more commonly than we elevate and improve our people. I think I have earned a knowledge of the "poor" in this country that forbids any

taint of selfishness or cruelty on my part. I have lived with the "people" as one of themselves. I know them pretty well. Yet I say that freeing them from responsibility in regard to their children, and burdening the hard-working and industrious members of the community, will not be for the advantage of either parents or children. I have in my mind just now this suggestion—that the ratepayers should be taxed to provide free breakfasts for the children of the poorer classes.

Look for a moment at a few little pictures I will paint for you.

Here is a filthy room in a low mews—it is the home of a cab-driver and his family. There are six children, and two are cripples! The father as a rule earns a good wage; he is employed by a livery-stable proprietor. He is away all day and his wife spends her time at the neighbouring "pub." She has no responsibilities—there are three Charity Societies looking after her children. She comes in drunk one evening, and taking up one of the younger children flings him down on the pavement with—

"Wish yer'd break yer back, then I'd be rid of yer."

The “Karity Karnsil” looks after her cripples ; they are fed and cared for, and the respectable workers of the community are taxed for the purpose.

Here is a scene from a “home” in Hammersmith. No. 25 is a builder’s house.

The husband is a good workman when he is sober ; and when I first knew the family, the children, of whom there were three, were fairly well cared for and fed by their parents. One of the girls used to do odd jobs for me, such as knife-cleaning, etc. She had managed to enlist herself in four different “Fresh-air” Societies, and she spent her week-ends at Brighton or Southend, and other places at the community’s expense. The other two children were attending school, and they always had a good meal before they went. But a Charity Society, inspired by some “fool” spirit, came along and began giving the children free breakfasts. My two little friends joined the lists. The father and mother were thus relieved of household burdens, and took to visiting the public-house in the mornings, instead of only at nights, as they had hitherto done. In six months the whole family was ruined, and I had to send away

the girl because she began stealing my silver and any small thing she could lay her hands on.

Now I have a little one myself, the light of my eyes and the joy of my heart, and the love I bear this small mortal makes me feel very tenderly for all helpless mites left to the mercy of drunken and brutal parents, and all my womanhood rises up in passionate rebellion against the loose and immoral sentiment which would create and encourage bad parents. If we would truly help and protect the children, why not do as our despised neighbour Germany does? Compel the parents to work for their support, and find work for the fathers of families. Make it a criminal offence for a woman with a family to be served with more than one glass of beer in a public-house. This would not stop drunkenness, but it would lessen it.

Then again, look at the Maternity Charities, the Hospitals and Workhouse Infirmaries, and see the evils they encourage. I know a girl who has had three illegitimate children born in Charity Homes. She has been well cared for and well fed, and the children have all been provided for. In no instance has the man
for their appearance in the world

been heard of. This girl and her illegitimate children are supported without question by the hard-pressed middle classes, who hardly know where to turn for food and education for their own little ones.

Such charity is a premium on vice and idleness. The poor become poorer, the sick become more numerous, the ranks of the unemployed swell to hideous proportions—and this not so much because we are an uncharitable people, as because we are an unpractical people. No one wants to work, and no one will work unless compelled to. This is quite a natural weakness. I hate work myself, my husband hates work, all my friends hate work, but we go on working simply because no one is good enough to come forward and relieve us of our responsibilities. Our children must be fed, and we have to work for their food ; they must be educated, and we must provide for their education. But this is not enough ; our citizen duty is not yet done. We are required to feed, clothe, and educate the children of the lower classes, whose parents do not like work, and absolutely refuse to do any. In this laudable determination they are upheld by the charity of these “ Free-

mealers," who know about as much of the poor as my canary knows about the Education Bill. Thus do we encourage vice, profligacy, and idleness, by providing for the drunkard's children at the expense of the thrifty citizen, and giving aid to the idle by "rooking" the worker.

There is no sphere where the proverb "Too many cooks spoil the broth" is better exemplified than in the sphere of philanthropy. What we lack in Britain is method. It is not so much that we need more "charity"; this is a time when all right-thinking people should demand justice for themselves and their neighbours. We ought no more to be required to support the victims of the sweater and the dram-shop, than we should, after having paid our rates, be expected to serve in the police force. Charities that give promiscuously with no idea of demanding a return for their gifts are an absolute curse, and no part of the community suffers more severely from this weakness than the unfortunate children of those whom our ill-considered efforts are supposed to help. We sell our little ones into slavery; then when we find them crippled, deformed, and sick, we snatch them from their tainted homes and place

them in hospitals which cost millions to support. Would it not be cheaper to insist on a minimum wage for the mothers and fathers of these children, and with that to compel the fathers to put in a certain number of hours of labour each day? But supposing that some are too weak and feeble to fulfil the ordinary requirements of an employer, and we are obliged to provide other refuges for these destitute ones, then let us see to it that such places are merely the recruiting ground for larger enterprise. Every Home or Refuge should have a Labour Bureau attached, so that those seeking shelter might be put in the way of honest work, and given the opportunity of doing it. Our present Casual Ward System is both brutal and useless.

It has been my unhappy lot, while wandering among the desolate and homeless in the London streets, to tramp for miles in vain search for a decent shelter. The choice lay between vermin-infested "kip" houses, or the Casual Ward, which it was an indictable offence to enter more often than once a month. So we wanderers drifted about aimlessly—nameless shadows in the cruel streets, and this a city

whose “charity” is in the mouth of the world. Then despair got hold of us ; the charity of the most Christian city was proven false, there was no place of refuge. By twos and threes we drifted on—what a motley crowd it was ! Women, some with little babies, who had night-long wandered the streets ; girls who should have been waking to dreams of love, here they were wide-eyed and familiar with shame, and creatures withered out of all womanhood by the blasts of cruel fortune. It was the little babies I was most sorry for—it seemed so hard that these frail mortals should face the world so young ; and some of their mothers were good women who had laboured, but in vain, to keep the home together. It was on meeting such as these in the streets that I resolved, if ever the opportunity was given to me, to plead for more justice, for more true charity.

Afterwards, having seen the children in the “padding kens,” the “kip houses,” and the streets, I sought up and down London with other atoms of humanity for a place where women and children might find shelter for the night.

Upon one such I stumbled, and outside this place we gathered until the door opened and a kindly voice said, "Come in, sister." "Sister!" some of us repeated. Then I said :

"Here indeed is charity, here is Christ-love."

The place was simple enough—it was bare, but warm and clean ; and though very cheap, yet I learnt later, to my astonishment, that it was self-supporting. And this place was a Salvation Army shelter for women and children—the only one in London.

We paid our coppers and we rested. We found friends who asked us whence we came and whither we were going. The little ones had food, and the babies had a drink of milk—poor mites ! At last some one cared ! Work was found for some, and to most fell a little gleam from the star of hope. Such charity is Christian and common sense; here the people were, as the Americans say, almost "enthused" for work, and it was a charity administered by trained philanthropists and economists—we could do with many more such !

CHAPTER X

THE BOX-MAKERS

IN strolling down Bond Street, or any other fashionable West-End thoroughfare, one looks into the gorgeous shop windows, and in many of these there strikes the eye an array of dainty boxes containing all manner of goods. In the fascinating confectionery shops there are generally piled up in the windows beautiful boxes of chocolates and sweets tied up with rich and lovely tinted ribbons. Then supposing one enters a shop and makes purchases, say, of handkerchiefs or gloves or shoes, or any of the multitudinous things which appertain to our daily life, these are generally put up neatly in cardboard boxes, or sent home for us in the safe shelter of such.

Would you care to inquire into the history of these receptacles, some so dainty and light, some so strong and practical-looking? For

they all have a history, and it is mixed up with the story of many lives.

When I was a little girl, good and moral tales were greatly in fashion, and subjects that were written of for children were generally entwined with some sort of exemplar teaching. The discovery that some pretty story-book I was reading held a lesson affected me as unpleasantly as an adventure which now and again in these enterprising days is likely to befall the most wary readers. You begin a column in a newspaper. It has some topical and interesting heading ; you read down perhaps halfway before you discover that you are reading the eulogy of some famous pill or mixture which at that moment you would like to consign to the deep sea.

I remember with uncharitable feelings, even at this time, a prettily coloured book which purported to be the story of a doll, but which, on careful reading through, was a history of an article of manufacture. One learnt how the sawdust was made, how the linen was woven, how the wax mould for the face was set. Then the sewing process was described, and lastly the packing and warehousing of the doll. One

might just as well have thrust a penknife into one's favourite doll's middle and seen the saw-dust pour out, as read that illuminating story, for the doll was after that a doll no longer, but merely an article to be bought and sold.

Perhaps in reading this unromantic version of the baby slaves doomed to toil in our midst some people may be disgusted at the unvarying reiteration of their sordid lives, and wish that they might have romance or beauty mixed up with the stories, just to make them pleasanter reading. When a novel or a book is produced solely for the recreation or amusement of readers it becomes an author's duty to place the story before them in as varied and attractive a light as possible ; but to make traffic with the agonies of little children and the sorrowful histories of those who suffer while we sleep, would savour of the worst kind of immorality —that of untruth ; and we are a people who pride ourselves on desiring the truth.

In spite of the “Entente Cordiale” and International Clubs, and the frequent exchange of hospitalities between other nations and ourselves, the opinion that our neighbours have of us is not on the whole flattering. They say of

England, and surely not causelessly, that she is the most hypocritical nation in the world. Smug people at home will tell you the reason of these hard sayings is that all the world is jealous of England. This may have been true half a century ago, but is it true to-day? What is there in England now that is so worthy of jealousy and emulation by foreigners? They see us, not with our own eyes, but with the eyes of practical men and women who have no need to gloss over ugly sores and make excuses for daily failings. The glamour of ancient greatness is around us all, but we have not one shred of hope which encourages us to believe that the future will in any way reflect the past. The soldiers who planted our flag wide over the earth in the face of storm and wave were not men bred in our hideous city slums, they were not the offspring of the victims of the sweating shop. And the sturdy colonists who went out to brave nature in her most unrelenting form, in frozen zone and tropic sea making new worlds for England, were not the residue of beaten, overwhelmed wretches who creep out from their lairs sodden with drink and despair, because their birthright has been stolen from

them, they having neither the right to live nor to work. Can you teach patriotism to children who are always weary? Can you plant pride in hearts that are wrung dry with toil and hunger?

The foreigner visiting our capital is soon made aware of the falseness of our position, for our streets are thronged with prostitutes from other nations, and our parks and thoroughfares are filled with our own starving people. Such unveiled vice and open misery are not to be met with in any other city of the world.

The stranger may buy a delicious box of sweets in Bond Street, and say :

“ Well, these English can do some things well enough.”

Then he turns to some friend who has lived in London for years, learning the heart of the city.

“ Show me some of *the* London,” says he ; and the one initiated into the truth of things takes him out of the glamour and gaiety of the lighted streets down some of the back ways. After a while the foreigner holds his nose and says :

“ It is enough ! ”

And so would you, good reader, cry "Enough," if you placed yourself within the tender mercies of some worker among the lost people of London. You think that you are going for a jaunt. You provide yourself with a small white box of chocolates, and you mount with your guide to the top of an omnibus. You talk and you refresh yourselves as you proceed ; then your guide suddenly takes the little box from your hand, and turning it over, in a corner she sees a mysterious number.

"Ah," says she to you quickly, "would you like to see where that box was made ? "

"Yes," you answer gaily, and she takes you at your word. You have heard of the box factories, of course. In these places thousands and thousands of boxes are made—boxes of every colour and shape that can be imagined. Once I worked in such a place and got practical experience of the labour, but it pays the manufacturers almost better to give out the boxes to be made at home. So it comes about that women and children are employed in making them, in places which, for want of a better word, they call "homes." The women who are attached to the factories and receive

work to take home are generally known by a number, like criminals in prison ; but the children who help them have no numbers—they are not counted.

Box-making is carried on as a rule by the very poor, and the places they live in are not delectable. The number on your box was 1001—it seems curiously familiar, by the way. Your companion chances to know the number, and she will take you to the house where it was made. The way lies through dim streets with black water in the open gutters, and refuse at the street doors ; through rows of dismal houses and small shops—stop and look at them. There is the fried-fish shop, the pork and brawn shop, and the green-grocer's shop, filled with what to you would appear like refuse from Covent Garden market carts. But there are a few oranges piled up on an empty box, and some tired-looking apples. Then there is the milk shop ! They are not troubled with any undue reticence, the merchants in these localities—they place their wares where you can see them, and where no germ or speck of dust would be proscribed. If you don't like their wares you can leave

them ; and so you pass on. Now turn into this blind alley, the third door on the left—this is the house. Up two flights of stairs—you will perceive that they are neither wide nor altogether safe, for loose boards lie roughly over some, and many of the bannister rails are out. You reach your destination at last and knock at the door. There is no welcoming voice to bid you enter, so you knock again, and a little child comes and opens the door very slowly.

“ Wotcher want ? ” she says.

Then she recognises your companion for a friend, and so you pass in. It is past six o’clock in the evening, and the owner of the room—a woman, white-faced and gaunt—sits at the bare table ; her eldest daughter is opposite. They hardly pause in their work to welcome you, and the three young children stand busily engaged spreading the glue on the paper and handing it to mother and sister. The room is half filled with a bed, which is piled with some rags, and on these are cast some pasted boxes. See how quickly they work ! Great skill is necessary, extreme accuracy, and such swiftness and certainty of touch that, though the workers’

fingers are filthy to look at and sticky with glue, no mark appears on the boxes, and the tissue paper pasted on, to serve as a delicate sheet for the sweets to lie under later, is spotless.

The room in which this happy family lives costs four-and-sixpence a week, and the income that they earn between them by toil that is almost incessant amounts in very good times to perhaps ten shillings for six days' work—a day of thirteen or fourteen hours. The children know that unless they can help their mother they will go short of food and fire, so you will notice that they are not greatly interested in your appearance—they are too limp and weary to be inquisitive. Your companion speaks to the woman.

“Is work good now?”

“Fair,” answers this victim of toil.

“Perhaps you could spare Jimmy and Maggie to come out next Saturday with the Ragged School Union?”

The two children look up at last. You see that the little girl has pretty hair, but it is all tangled; being naturally curly it is a distressing operation to comb it, and there is so little

time that it is often left for weeks. Jimmy's coat is buttoned up to the throat—one knows that the box-maker's children can seldom afford shirts. The mother looks up with a frown on her face.

"The landlord ain't agoin' to wait for the rent, and we can't starve for a week for them kids to go gallivantin' about to picnics ; the likes of us must do what we can."

The little heads droop, but there is no complaint. By-and-by there may be tears of disappointment, but if they wept over their work they would be thrashed. Think what it would mean to have those dainty boxes spotted with tears !

A short time ago there was a letter in one of the papers from some one connected with the Home Workers' Union, and what the lady said was, in effect, that home work ought not to be discouraged, since it was easier for the women to bear the toil in a quiet room than in the awful noise and rush and bad air of a factory. It seems a barbarous thing to wish to deprive these poor wretches of their means of living, but unless their wages can be regulated so that one can be assured that

the children will not be pressed into this incessant toil, it would be better that these miserable toilers should die out than that they should live and breed, and lay such burdens of servitude on frail babes. Fancy a child of seven working for his daily food ! And such food ! often no more than one meal a day, and that probably a bit of bread and margarine, or perhaps a scrap of brawn and some stale crusts. What are you going to do with the children who are nourished in this wise ?

The persons visiting such homes casually flee from them in despair, and the memory of these children haunts them until they determine to forget the existence of such unhappy mortals—children who live in foul odours, labouring with tired hands to make pretty boxes to hold sweets and presents for good and happy children.

The workers themselves resent very bitterly any interference or inquiries about their trade. They live in terror lest their work should be snatched from them and they be left with no means of support. The one thing that may be urged in favour of factory work over home work is that owing to the system of inspection

it is not possible for little children to be engaged regularly in work at factories, and it is better that the mother should bear a little extra stress and noise than that she should have the opportunity at home of putting her little ones into bondage. As to the air, one wonders on entering these home-workers' premises whether air is really a necessity of human life! In these pent houses of theirs, where the window is hardly ever opened and the family works and sleeps and eats, and starves, all in the one room, the less said about air the better.

The piteous part of these grim histories is that there is no necessity for such poverty and such slavery—it is the result of hideous greed and rapacity on the one hand, and of ignorance and helplessness on the other. I have seen it urged that if women would pay decent prices for their clothes there would not be any sweating of poor seamstresses. This is not true; if women paid ten times as much as they do for their things there would still be sweating. So long as there is no law to protect the sweated workers, just so long will the evil continue.

It is true that cardboard boxes are cheap, but these beautiful and dainty receptacles are used for goods which fetch a fair price, and there would be no undue strain on the buyers of these boxes if they were obliged to pay somewhat more for them. But even if they did so, the women and children who manufactured them would be in no way benefited, for the middle-man and the factory owner would still swallow up the profits and give the miserable workers the smallest pittance possible.

Even in the days of American slavery the little piccaninnies were allowed to play about their master's grounds till they came to a certain age before they were set to work ; but in England, in spite of the Acts of Parliament which have been framed for the protection of children—and there have been twelve new ones within the last ten years—there is not one strong enough to break the bonds of these small toilers, shut away in unknown dens in our great cities.

CHAPTER XI

“THE OLD HEN”

IT must be that being cursed with a naturally unsympathetic nature I have sometimes been insensible to the exquisite pathos and sentiment in those wonderful stories which one hears or reads now and again in some precious book, wherein the heroine—a creature of lofty soul and idealic aspirations—is so misunderstood and so little valued in this mundane place that she possesses not a single friend in the world ! Hence she is forced to bestow the fervid passions of an over-wrought heart on a mouse or a canary, which creatures alone, of all her unsympathetic neighbours, can appreciate and divine her transcendent yearnings. It seems to my practical nature that a person in this teeming world who places herself in a position where nothing but a black beetle or a foreign monkey can return her affection, must only

be fit for extermination. But I find myself less severely minded when I think of the old hen, the friend and companion of little John Bench, a crippled toiler who spent his time, from daylight to dark, on a stool at a window looking out into a street that bore the name of "Paradise." John Bench was eleven years old, he had a hump-back and thin, twisted legs, so match-like and frail that they would support his body only a few minutes at a time. His face was pallid, and the thick hair was matted closely around it. Most of his teeth were decayed, but in that unlovely visage was set a wondrous pair of eyes—such eyes as make you marvel how the soul that lies behind them, knowing so much of the mystery of sorrow, and having so deep a knowledge of good and evil, can yet remain in such a frail body.

John Bench sat at his window all the livelong day, with three pots of paint before him, daubing over with skill and swiftness rough animals and men made of white wood, which his father carved. This fond parent worked on an average two days a week ; the rest of the time John and his mother toiled to keep the

brute in drink. A heavy smell of paint hung about the room, which was small and square, and three stories up. When the toys were dried Mrs. Bench went out and sold them, tramping many weary miles to find purchasers. Until John was seven years old, although he had shared the responsibility of being a bread-winner, he had never been in the country, nor had he seen any of those creatures which seem to be born into the world not only to adorn the fields and farms, but to make picture books for children.

It chanced one day that Mrs. Bench, having out-walked her strength, tumbled down in a public street, fainting, as she said, "dead away." She was carried to a hospital and lay there for some days weak and helpless, having broken a small blood-vessel. By some good fortune there came a visitor to the place, and Mrs. Bench in tears confided to her that little John was left alone to undertake the duties of house-keeping, and to pacify, if possible, a father who returned drunk at nights with unfailing regularity. Sometimes he was dead drunk, sometimes he was fighting drunk; and if he was fighting drunk—God help poor John!

That was how this small worker was discovered. He was all bruised and battered, hiding behind the bed by the wall on hearing steps outside, for fear it might be his father returning to urge him to quicker work. John's hands were discoloured with paint, and his little body was black and blue with bruises. He cried out in sheer terror when the lady found him. So it was arranged that he was to go to a children's home in the country for a happy week, until his mother was recovered and able to return home again. This home was in the real country, and round about were cottages and farms. In the fields were fat brown-and-white cows, in the ponds were ducks and goslings, and in many a gravelly patch consequential hens fussed over their fluffy broods.

John was lodged in one of the cottage homes. Being a little Cockney, his natural self-assertion kept him at the outset of the journey from making many remarks, but when he arrived at the railway station and a rude engine rushed past, letting off a great volume of steam with a loud shriek, the child almost inted with terror. He could hardly be

persuaded to enter the carriage ; but all difficulties being overcome, he was at length whirled away into the heart of the country.

The world has witnessed no more marvellous revelation than this green place was to little John, who every day of his life had only looked out on to the sodden street, inanimate and hideous. Taken in tow by two of the other children who lived in the cottage, John was wheeled out in a little chair by field and hedgerow, until he came at last to a neighbouring chicken run. After that no other place could charm him so ; the chickens were his heart's delight.

As is the way in such homes, the good mother was shocked at the child's incomprehension of religion, and total ignorance of the name of God. So she sought to pour into the bewildered mind as much theological instruction as could be compassed in the meagre time at her disposal. All that John's mind was able to grasp was that somewhere behind the sky there lived a Person who, if you got away into some quiet corner and asked Him for anything very hard, would probably hear you and grant your request. John had had few requests

granted in his life, and he had made few, but the day before he was to leave this heavenly place he was found hidden away by a bush in the garden, saying :

“ Mr. God, please, please give me one of them little chicks to take 'ome with me.”

Over and over again the prayer was said, and then the little voice broke, and in an agony the child cried out :

“ Oh, 'e won't give me it, 'e won't give me it ; and they 'ave got such a many, and I only want one—one little chick to take 'ome with me.”

It was too much for the kind-hearted mother to send that desolate child back to the fearful den in London from whence he came, without a thing to comfort him or make the burden of his life less dreary. So she found a little basket and in it she placed a chick, with some grain and gravel, and John carried it home. All the way to London he looked from time to time within the basket to see that his treasure was safe, and he treasured in his mind the directions for feeding the chick.

His home-coming was in this wise. It was

the afternoon, and Mr. Bench had done less work than usual that week, and his wife had been less successful in hawking her wares, so John was borne home, an unwelcome addition to that unlovely household. When the door was shut behind the friend who brought him back, the affectionate father almost fell on the terrified child, and gripping him by the collar shook him half to death.

"Yer lazy beast," he said, "where 'ave yer been? Eatin' and growin' fat while we 'ave to work and starve. Wot 'ave yer got in that basket?"

"Don't 'arry the child," remonstrated the woman, coming between the father and son, and she was rewarded for her pains by a blow that sent her half across the floor. John told us these things later. The little fellow up and spoke like a man.

"It ain't nothing but a chick, father, and I'll work like anything now, you just see if I don't."

The father tore open the basket, and with a rough hand seized the fluffy bundle by the wings.

"Oh don't—don't 'urt 'im," wailed the child.

“Yer can ‘urt me, but don’t kill the chick, it’s so small. I’ll work like anything if you’ll leave it alone.”

“All right!” said the great brute, flinging the ball of fluff under the table. “See that yer don’t go leavin’ any more, or I’ll know the reason why! I’ll soon twist the neck of yer pretty chick, and yourn too.” So saying he went out of the room. John fell into his mother’s arms and they wept together. After that work began again, and things grew worse, for the father would do less and less of his carving, and the mother herself was forced to try and fashion the rude toys. She was but clumsy at the task, but fear drove her on, and with practice, and blows and curses from her husband, she became fairly expert. Her work had to be carried on far into the night, and from early morning till about noon, then she would sally forth with her wares—and John painted and painted. A terrible fear was added to the lives of the mother and boy, for the brute who owned them learned the passionate love which the little fellow bestowed on his chicken, rapidly growing into an ungainly hen. The creature would place itself on the window-

ledge and John would talk to it, and almost every day the tyrant came in and threatened to kill the bird, until poor John shivered in a ghastly sweat with apprehension, and the mother would force down into her heart the torrent of terrible curses that she dared not let rise to her lips.

And so the chick grew to be a hen. It slept with little John on a bundle of rags, and the child, as if he were repeating some charm, would ask God to take care of his chick. Such a funny old hen she grew, rusty black and very skinny. There was no run for her, and she shared John's meals, which were far less liberal than hers had been in her early days at the farm. John lived mostly on bread and tea, and the hen drank from his cup. Mrs. Bench herself grew quite attached to the odd bird, and always declared it was "rare knowin'," which it certainly was, for its only companions had been human. It was a regular old maid of a hen, and sometimes seemed to put on those ridiculously affected airs which ancient maiden ladies occasionally assume. She had had no male relations to discipline her, but in John's eyes a more perfect bird was never

bred. It was the one companion and confidant he had. Many a kick the old hen took, cackling and fluttering under the bed to escape the violence which invariably greeted it if Mr. Bench appeared on the scene. Many a time when John and his mother and the hen had all been kicked and cuffed by the brutal master, they clung together when he had departed, and consoled themselves with some scraps of food or a little affectionate gossip.

But at length the long hours of toil and the cutting, cruel odours of the crude paints wore John's life almost to a thread. The little chap toiled bravely on day after day, and nothing could be done for him, for his mother would not let him go ; he was all she had. Then there was the hen to think of ; and had a way of escape been found for the child, Mr. Bench would assuredly have murdered the mother and found and claimed his son. The law of England is made rather for the protection of parents than of children ; it is the most difficult thing in the world to take a child from the protection of its parents, or, to speak more truly, to rescue it from such brutality as

this child daily received. So John faded, and in spite of kicks and blows he lay at last with the hen nestled up to him, and his father's step was heard. The child with a mighty effort rose and pretended to work, almost mad with fear lest vengeance should be wreaked not on him, but on the old hen.

Summer came, and John's friend was planning in some way or another to obtain a little respite for the child, and have him carried to the country for another holiday—he had had but one in his life! But fate had another journey in store for him. Mr. Bench came in drunk one day when little John was very, very ill. With all his efforts he could not raise himself, so his father kicked him, and then in bestial fury he chased the hen until he caught it. In spite of John's agonising pleading, he crushed the bird's head beneath his heel. Then John's desire to live forsook him.

Mrs. Bench returned that night, and seeing how things were, while her husband was out for a little while, she gathered some mean possessions into a small bundle, and wrapping John up, she carried him out, going she knew not whither,

“Quick, quick,” said the dying child, “don’t let ‘im catch us.” He didn’t catch them. They spent the night in a forsaken house, in some unknown quarter, and in the morning Mrs. Bench struggled with her child to the hospital. Dying was made easier there, and when this was accomplished the desperate mother crept back to the old slum, and not finding her husband there she sought him at his favourite pub, and in the face of all the men and women present poured out upon him her curses and reproaches. And then she went away.

There is a problem here to be worked out by some of our wiseacres.

What good could little John and his like claim from any law in England? There is but one hope for such: and that is for men who are notoriously unemployed, and who are detected loafing in public-houses beyond a certain time each day, to be placed in some labour colony and compelled to pay to the State a certain sum for the support of their families.

I have heard it said that we cannot compel people to be good and sober by Acts of Parlia-

ment. Perhaps not. We may not be able to change their natures, but if the Acts were strong enough we certainly could control their actions so far as they concerned the State and community.

CHAPTER XII

IS THERE ANY WAY OUT?

In a chapter on suggested remedies for the evil of sweated home work Miss Clementina Black, in a pamphlet on the Sweated Industries Exhibition, says :

“ No person acquainted with the poorer phases of home work can fail to be aware that child labour is one of its characteristic features. When a mother is being paid at the rate of a penny to twopence an hour and sees her children hungry, the temptation to add a few more pennies by setting her children to work grows overwhelming. This temptation is a fruitful cause of absence from school, and a cause, even more frequent, of prolonged labour after and before school hours. . . . The same pressure that leads to the employment of children presently leads, in a slack time, to the acceptance of yet lower pay for the sake of

securing work. The poorer the worker the less possible is resistance to any reduction in pay. Thus by-and-by mother and children working together come to receive no more than did the mother working alone."

In suggesting remedies she says, regarding a Bill which was proposed by the Women's Industrial Council of London, and printed in 1905 :

"The central principle of this Bill is, that dwelling-places in which work 'in any trade or industry' is done, shall be places certified by an Inspector as 'suitable for the purpose and properly equipped with means of ventilation.'"

There are other stipulations regarding home work, and it is proposed that certificates lasting for six months should be granted. The benefits expected from such legislation, she tells us, would be of a twofold kind :

"In the first place, high rents could no longer be derived from the letting of cramped, dilapidated and unsuitable premises, whose only merit consists in proximity to the places from which work is given out, and to which it must be carried back. At present the home worker

has to content himself, or herself, with any room, however bad its condition, that lies near enough to save time and fares. Under the new regulations, he or she would be able—would, indeed, be obliged—to refuse rooms for which a certificate could not be obtained ; and landlords in certain districts would find themselves unable to let—even at reduced rentals—rooms that fell below a certain standard of space, cleanliness, and airiness.

In the second place, that risk to the consumer which unquestionably arises when such articles as garments are manufactured in very dirty or infectious places would be appreciably lessened.

Miss Black also says that there are four evils to be reckoned with in home work :

1. Excessive hours.
2. Unsuitability of work-place.
3. Employment of child labour.
4. Low pay.

And she strikes at the root of the evil so far as the children are concerned in the next paragraph.

“ This evil would, it is hoped, be in some degree checked by those provisions of the Bill

described above, which fix a maximum number of persons to be at work in any certificated place. But in its essence this evil is really but a part of the deeper-seated evil of under-payment. While there is always a possibility whenever home work is carried on that children may be set to work, the danger of their being kept at work for very long hours and to their own lasting injury is really only serious where the pressure of poverty is extreme. The real cure for the labour of children lies in the adequate payment of the labour of parents."

So we come mechanically to the one effectual remedy for child slavery in this country, which is a Minimum Wages Bill. This will be by no means an easy thing to accomplish ; and even were such a Bill to be passed, there would yet be isolated cases of excessive labour and extreme poverty among home workers. But these would only be isolated cases ; the whole class of home workers would be lifted up to a more decent plane, and by a system of strict inspection, and a granting of certificates to home workers which would ensure the examination of their premises, and above all, a Minimum Wages Bill which would regulate the payment

to be made for all classes of work, at varying rates, of course, to suit the labour required,—one of the most hideous evils of our times would, within a short space, be swept away.

An interesting account given in this same book was rendered by a woman who had kept herself and her little girl on six shillings a week. Here is the account of expenditure :

	s. d.
Rent, one room . . .	2 0 per week
Tea, $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. . . .	4 " "
Sugar, 2 lb. . . .	3 " "
Flour	1 $\frac{1}{2}$ " "
Oatmeal	1 $\frac{1}{2}$ " "
Margarine, $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. . .	3 $\frac{1}{2}$ " "
Six eggs (chipped) . .	3 $\frac{1}{2}$ " "
Ham	2 $\frac{1}{2}$ " "
Coals	3 " "
Onions, or other vegetables	1 $\frac{1}{2}$ " "
Bread	4 $\frac{1}{2}$ " "
"Kitchen" costing about	3 " "

The weekly total came to about 4s. 9d., leaving a balance of 1s. 3d. for clothes and other expenses.

This woman was a shirt-maker ; the hours of her work counted from seven or eight in the morning until eleven or twelve at night.

Particulars are given of the wife of a labourer who has three children, all under six years old. She makes men's shirts at 1*s.* 3*d.* a dozen, and boys at 1*s.* a dozen. In this case we are told, as in many others, the shirts on which the mother is engaged are absolutely certain to be used as bedding for the family at night, thus lending themselves as a medium for the dissemination of dirt, disease, and vermin among the purchasing public.

Cheap garments such as these shirts, tailored skirts, and other articles of dress are by no means all "slop" goods, and they are not made for sale to the poorest classes any more than the sweated furniture is produced for the poor classes. These articles are sold for a good price to respectable people.

Some of us find it in our hearts to say that the public might occasionally have read to them a practical lesson on this slavery of their fellows. The unfortunate part is, although disease is undoubtedly spread by articles manufactured in filthy and insanitary conditions, yet this is seldom traced to its source. The bitterest pity of all these tragedies is that there is absolutely no reason why they should exist at all. One

may go into a shop in the West End and buy clothes that are, to all appearances, exceedingly cheap, and one says :

“ Oh, these could not be sold were it not for sweated labour ! ”

But they could be sold just as cheaply even if the worker received a fair wage for making them, and still there would be a liberal profit for manufacturer and retailer. In these days cloths and cotton stuffs are bought wholesale at extremely low prices. This does not necessarily mean that the factory workers are sweated ; the raw materials themselves are cheap. We have enormous imports of cotton as well as of wool, and millions of yards are turned out at comparatively small cost. Of course factory hands are overworked and underpaid often, but not to such a shameful extent as the home-worker, who has no redress. Then, too, fortunately very young children may not be employed in factories. Mr. James Macdonald, secretary of the London Trades Council, defines sweating and home labour thus :

“ The home-worker enjoys the same advantages, with the additional advantage that members of the family can all join in the

work, and can work as long as they like, and save the expense of the workshop rent.

“A sweater is an employer who, to compete with the subdivision of labour and machinery, compels his employees to produce work at the same cost to him as if he used the most up-to-date methods of production.

“It is easy to see that the next step from home-working is to sweating. The members of the Jewish race are generally associated with the system ; but, as a matter of fact, when Jews were almost unheard of in connection with the trade, sweating had raised its ugly head in the homes of the Gentile tailor. If, however, the Jews did not introduce it, they certainly were responsible for its rapid development. They saw its possibilities and seized upon them ; their fellow-Gentiles have not been slow to follow the lead where they could, but the Jew can always beat them.

“The Jewish sweater has a constant supply of willing workers, ignorant alike of the language and customs of the country, of the industry itself, but oh, so willing ! Night and day a man toils for just sufficient coarse food to keep body and soul together, and mayhap

the right to sleep on the workshop board for a few hours out of the twenty-four. He is then a 'greener,' but in a few months he has mastered his work so far that he starts off in some garret or cellar as a full-blown sweater himself. He goes to the warehouse whence his former employer got his work, and offers to do it at a lesser price, sends for more of his compatriots, sweats them as he was sweated himself, and they in turn serve him as he served his employer, and so keep alive the vicious system. The raw 'greeners' of yesterday elbow out the more efficient workers of to-day, who in turn elbow out some one more efficient still ; they in turn attack the bespoke branch of the trade, which had formerly been looked upon as a preserve of the Gentile craftsman."

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My concern in this book is not so much the adult toilers, but the story of the children's slavery could not be told without going very fully into the conditions of their parents ; nor could the cause of the children be pleaded until the story of their lives has been laid bare. There are so many contributing causes to this bondage under which the little ones suffer, that one must

examine them carefully in order to understand just how to work for the children. The magnitude of an affair has not hitherto been sufficient to frighten British men and women from attempting to deal with it. Wars have been undertaken, millions have been paid in compensation in order to strangle trades which were injurious to the nation ; but there never has been, and never will be, any evil more fatal to the progress of a people than this of selling the children into slavery.

It would not be necessary, for the protection of the children, to make a Wages Board for the entire working population ; but it would instantly touch the children were Wages Boards organised for the sweated industries.

It is a curious fact that in all arguments relating to woman's position as a citizen, it is maintained that she need never have, as indeed she never has had, the wages of a man. Tradition has it that a man is the supporter of the family. Among the home-workers this idea that the man supports the family is a myth! Almost the entire burden falls on the women and the children. Still we would not so far frustrate our own end as to fight for an

equal wage for men and women : this Utopian condition will not come about, at any rate in our time.

In order to fix any sort of rate for home-workers, it would be necessary to take into consideration the minimum amount of food required for each individual, and the amount that might in justice be paid for house-room. Then some small allowance might be made for household necessities and clothes. But whereas we know to a nicety what it would cost to keep our animals on a farm, we make absolutely no effort to inquire into the maintenance and feeding of the children of our working classes.

The Fabian Society, which works in a quiet way for the amelioration of the down-trodden and the protection of the weak, issued a tract which urges an Act of Parliament being passed to fix and enforce a wage which shall be sufficient to enable our workers to be maintained in a healthy condition, and it advises that

age should be based on what the worker is for physical health and efficiency.

ortunately any reforms which are suggested by socialists or Radical workers invariably

overlook the most potent cause of the under-payment and grinding of the faces of the poor. No Bills or Acts of Parliament would effect a lasting cure for this canker of child slavery unless it were backed up by housing laws and such severe measures against the rack-renting aliens as would make it impossible for those parasites to feed on our people.

In looking over the list of workers indexed under the Minimum Wages Law in Belgium, I do not find there any account of the kind of people with whom this book is mainly concerned. The trades which are affected by the Minimum Wages there, are evidently trades in which men are almost exclusively engaged ; but what we need here for the protection of the children is such a comprehensive Bill that it would include all those trades which are carried on generally by women.

Mrs. Henry Fawcett, in arguing for the Woman's Franchise, says :

“ I advocate the extending of the Franchise to women because I wish to strengthen true womanliness in women, and because I want to see the womanly and domestic side of things

weigh more and count for more in all public concerns."

If woman's influence in politics could bring about legislation that would mitigate the sufferings of our baby toilers and worn work-women, we would all earnestly pray that the vote might fall to them. But what reason have we to hope that this will be the case? There are at the present day over a million more women than men in this country, and no one but a fool would deny a woman's influence. Yet this hideous evil remains in our midst, and people are so occupied squabbling over unnecessary political points that they have neither time nor heart to take up the work which is of the most vital importance to the whole nation. It gives one a curious feeling to sit in a comfortable room and realise that if the women of Great Britain chose to decree that these ills should not be visited upon their sisters, and the little ones of our cities, that no agencies would be strong enough to uphold these malpractices, they would go down like a row of ninepins before the blast of public opinion. But how few women there are who seem to care!

CHAPTER XIII

“ MARIA JANE ”

LATELY, at a lecture I was invited to give in his house, Lord Brassey made some trenchant remarks on child and women slavery as it now exists in our midst, and his recommendation of a large alleviation, if not a positive cure, for the disease was the establishment of Wages Boards. This measure, of course, almost all those who have any sympathy with, and knowledge of those who lie in servitude would heartily endorse.

But there are so many of our children whose condition must be a puzzle to the keenest thinker and most accomplished philanthropist. There are little creatures living lives of such toil as will hardly bear description, whom we know not how to help, unless, indeed, such drastic measures be taken with their parents that it will cease to pay to sell the children into bondage.

Among the many curious phases of life which I have studied in this country as an insider, none, I think, presents more difficulties than those which give us gleams of the little girls and lads who serve in domestic or semi-domestic capacities. I am immediately concerned chiefly with the girls who, on an absurd assumption of years beyond which they have any claim to, set out to earn not only their own living, but to buttress the fortunes of their families.

On August 14, 1903, the Employment of Children Act received Royal assent. In this Act, Section I. enables any legal authority to make by-laws prescribing for all children and in respect to all occupations, or to any specified occupation, the age below which employment is illegal, the hours between which employment is illegal, and the number of daily and weekly hours beyond which employment is illegal ; prohibiting absolutely, or permitting subject to conditions, the employment of children in any specified occupation.

The Act also embodies a law regarding street trading by persons under sixteen, and the engagement of children in theatres. This

Act came into operation on January 1, 1904. Here stands the basis of a law which would prove effective in shielding the class of child slave I shall now describe, if there were any possibility of its being put into effect. But children engaged in domestic occupations seem to be left severely alone; nor have I ever known a case among the many which I personally have been brought into contact with, where any outside influence has been brought to bear on the child's condition, or any protection offered to a victim of the unthinking greed of adults.

In most of the Acts which have the protection of children for their object, the age during which a supervision has to be kept over them is generally set at fourteen years. The number of children who attain this age in our great cities by grace of this Act is astonishing. Almost every little Arabella whom you in your inexperience might judge to be somewhere about nine years old, if as much, will inform you upon being questioned as to her age that she is just "gone fourteen," and has passed the fourth standard.

There fell into my hands one day in my own

household the account-book of a damsel who assisted my housekeeper by doing the washing up and some of the rougher work. She had—of course—passed the fourth standard, and having a methodical mind, which is entirely uncommon among her class, she had set down the things she had bought either for herself or for her mother. One page of the book ran thus :

beaf, 9d.

1 love, 2d.

daita, 1d.

and so on.

Now if this child had passed the fourth standard, as her mother of course informed me she had done, I can only say that the Board School method of teaching spelling might make even Eton blush. The constantly moving population of the great cities makes it easier for parents to detain their children from school and set them to work.

I have not been able to find anywhere statistics which give one the number of children employed in lodging-houses, small milliners' shops, and establishments of such description. It must be that no account is taken of these

submerged little ones. I was for some time very deeply interested in the condition of working girls in this country, and under this heading must be counted the girls employed in domestic service. A certain amount of inquiry and further familiarity with this class of workers inspired me to make a series of investigations into the conditions of domestic service, especially of the little girls who are employed in private and semi-private places of business. This campaign led to some very unhappy discoveries, and time and again I encountered, myself working in a humble capacity in some of these places, cases of peculiarly obnoxious slavery endured by little girls.

There are several ways in which these children are employed for domestic purposes, both indoor and out. On one occasion, in order to come into better contact with girls who earn their living as step-cleaners, I entered into a sort of partnership with a young girl who followed this occupation. The rate of payment is generally twopence for a long flight of stairs, and a penny for a couple or three steps. It was during this period that I got a

practical insight into the manner of life endured by these children. They began often as early as six or eight years old, and in such cases they worked before and after school hours, trudging from house to house with their impedimenta, fetching out a heavy bucket of water, and then kneeling for hour after hour with nothing between their knees and the cold stone steps but a piece of rough sacking, which served the purpose of an apron.

Winter is a time of special torture to these children. They have to be up before daylight and away on their rounds. The exposure and mixture of water and bath-brick cracks the hands terribly, and the damp felt through the almost invariably torn shoes causes dreadful chilblains. Then come the cough, and the swollen knees.

Some people on reading this will say, "But this work must be done, and who is to do it?" Since we retain these relics of barbarism—steps that require whitening—the least that we can do is to see that the work is performed under suitable conditions by an adult of set frame and sufficient physical strength.

This work of the step girl's only falls to those of the very poorest and lowest classes. They are vilely fed at home, if fed they are, for their food in great part consists of scraps bestowed on them at their places of occupation. They are housed in insanitary quarters, and driven out to work in the hours when, under natural conditions, nature would secure them rest.

So from what I was able to gather of the lives of these girls I can see nothing for them—unless indeed they are of exceptional physique—but complete ruin long before they have arrived at womanhood. Of four girls whom I knew personally, engaged in this work, three of them were under fourteen years of age, and of these three, at one time or another, all had recourse to the nearest free Dispensary for medicines for coughs and liniments for swollen knees. This step-cleaning is a barbarous occupation for young girls!

But even more shocking than the condition of these little out-door slaves who contribute to the up-keep of their families, is the fate of the small slaveys in various lodging-houses and mean shops, with whom I gained a somewhat

intimate acquaintance. The story of "Maria Jane" will be sufficiently typical as an illustration of the lives of hundreds of little girls who toil from dawn until far into the night for a weekly pittance, or a wage of from eight to ten pounds a year.

On all hands one hears this servant problem discussed, and indeed it is an extremely difficult thing to obtain a good servant, even when the wages offered are very liberal. Yet the lowest ranks of service, recruited as they are from poor and miserable families, never seem to be thinned, and however often the lodging-house keeper may change her slave, she never fails to get a new victim in her place. Some of these children are pitifully sharp, and from their infancy have learnt how to deceive and shirk obedience. But once they pass into the hands of a typical lodging-house keeper their sorrows far outweigh their sins.

Maria Jane was a girl whose acquaintance I enjoyed. She was supposed to be fifteen years old ; in reality she was not twelve. This she told me one day in a burst of confidence. Her mother went out charing ; she had three brothers, of whom the two youngest were still

at school, and the eldest was engaged on a railway near by. She also had a sister who was servant in a cheap boarding-house. The father never suffered from overwork. " 'E likes company," Maria Jane told me; so he would loaf about, sometimes running after a cab on which he saw luggage, in the hope of being permitted to carry it into the house; or he would hold a horse's head, or stand with a dirty paper against a wheel to save a "fare's" dress. Any pence earned in this precarious way provided him with extra refreshment, but for his food and rent he depended entirely upon his wife and children. Maria Jane earned the magnificent salary of three shillings a week, and regularly on Saturday evenings her father came round and received her money from her hands. The only cash she ever had for herself was an occasional sixpence or a penny or two that might fall to her from some generous lodger. In that house there were sixteen people, and there were five flights of stairs from the basement to the attic. Maria Jane was the only servant. She had to be up before six in the morning, called by the landlady's son, who went out to his

work, which lay some distance off, at a very early hour. From the time she rose often until midnight, this unfortunate child was on her feet. Up and down those endless stairs she went, carrying scuttles of coal, dishes, hot water, and what not. Her legs were terribly swollen, and so weary and aching was her poor little body that in the morning many a time she came creeping downstairs with a pathetically black face, down which the tears had made little tracks. Sometimes she would sit on the little deal box in her attic before rolling into her bed, and thumping her grimy fists on her knees, she would hiss out :

“ I ‘ate ‘em all ! I wish they was all dead, I do—I ‘ate ‘em all ! ”

But she, like many of her class, would soon pass that rebellious stage and sink into the broken, slack-bodied creature who, while yet a child in years, has already overpassed a sorrowful womanhood in the knowledge of grief.

Such was Maria Jane as I knew her. She was not beautiful to look at, and she never had time to make herself clean—but she earned three shillings a week, for her parents, and,

after all, what are children for except "to make 'emselves useful"? as Maria Jane's father often told her.

The sorrows of the lodging-house slavey have been the subject of joke and play, but now it becomes a serious question when we remember that each of these children, given ordinarily decent surroundings, might grow up into a wholesome and useful woman.

Another class of child-slave is she who is employed partly in domestic work, and partly in running errands, while her spare moments are filled in with doing odd jobs, such as stitching for some seamstress. Almost every small milliner and dressmaker has in her employ one such girl, and these children are beyond the protection of the Factories Act. In many cases they attend their business by the day, arriving at the house about seven in the morning, and leaving between nine and ten o'clock at night. During these long hours such a child has scarcely any respite at all, for she does all the odd jobs of the establishment. She runs out to match a bit of silk, and arrives in to wash up the dinner plates. Then she

pauses to finish up a seam, and tacks on a few hooks and eyes, after which she polishes the irons ; and so from early morning, when her duties begin with lighting the fire and preparing her mistress's breakfast, to the last weary hour of the day, when she slips on her rusty hat and threadbare jacket, this child is full of work.

The pity of it is that these wretched little creatures are apprenticed to slavery of this kind long before their bodies are fitted to bear the strain of such drudgery. I have often wondered whether any relief could be suggested for these little ones. Considering the circumstances of their lives, it would hardly be a kindness to compel attendance at school. Their homes are so miserable and the lack of decent accommodation and food so shocking, that in some ways it is better for the children to be out of these places. The only idea that has occurred to me is that it might be possible to frame a law by which it would be made illegal for parents to receive any money from their offspring under sixteen years of age, and then only on the production of a birth certificate. This might be accomplished by allowing

school inspectors to visit all workshops and lodging-houses, and ascertaining the exact sort of domestic service employed at each place. If it were discovered that little girls were at work, all mistresses might be obliged, under the penalty of an exceedingly severe fine, to pay in the larger part of the child's wages to some public authority who would keep them for the benefit of the child on attaining a certain age.

Such a measure would “scotch the snake,” and give these helpless little girls a better chance in life. I know of few lots more pathetic and more hopeless than theirs.

CHAPTER XIV

THE COMING OF THE ANGEL

THE story I give in this chapter is told by the President of the Girls' Guild of Good Life at Hoxton, where she has worked for twenty-five long years among the poor.

In books dealing with cruel facts one must above all things guard against sentimentality ; the most sorrowful stories must be left unwritten. But now and again a few leaves from the lives of the outcast, falling on our tidy paths, may cause some of us to stop awhile, and think whether to us is given any responsibility in the matter of this disorder.

If there is a fault to find with this story it lies in the fact that it deals too gently with the squalor and ugliness of its setting. Nevertheless, being the history of one of our own club girls, I give it to illustrate some points of my own marking. If the tear rises unbidden to

the reader's eye and a sob to the throat, remember that the actuality was realised by the little heroine—a child not fourteen, one of our baby toilers.

See how they live—see how they die. Then if God does not give you grace to be a little ashamed, these slaves are vastly your superiors.

“I have so much to be thankful for in having the bed to myself all day. You see, at night when I'm restless I daren't move for fear of waking the others.”

“How many are there at night ?”

“Three of us ; there's nowhere else for them to sleep, and it's a great thing to have a bed. What a-many have to lie on the floor !”

“Are you in much pain now ?”

“Yes, I don't know how to bear it, and my cough is so bad it fair racks me with aches all over. But I have such lovely dreams sometimes that, do you know, I think it won't be long before I go to the land of dreams. Don't say a word, because it makes mother fret, and if she's upset father always gets worse. Things have been very rough on us lately. Father's a deal worse than he used to be. Mother has

got great whales all over her back and shoulders where he banged her with the poker."

"But couldn't some one prevent it?"

"No ; though he's so mad drunk, he's just that artful you'd never believe ! He nearly always manages to hit where it won't show, and he never goes out of the house when he's as bad as that ; for a policeman can take a man in charge when he's outside, but not if he's in his own room. 'His house is his castle,' he says."

"He's a good bit better since mother told him she'd get you to speak for her at the Court and get the Magistrate to bind him over to keep the peace ; but he forgets hisself at times, and then we all remember it."

"What are your dreams like, Maggie ?"

"Oh ! Just beautiful ! I'm in a land where it's always summer—not a hot stifling room like this, but a beautiful breezy place where you can lie on banks under trees. And the flowers ! There ! You'd never believe the scent of them flowers, and the prettiness of them ! I spent a whole day in the country once. It was Heaven !"

"And it's come to me often lately, in sort

of whispers that I hear quite plain, when I see these lovely things, ' You'll soon be there now, it won't be long. The days are numbered. Do your level best to bear patiently, and keep sweet and true, for Christ Himself has told the angel the very day that he must call for you and take you to His country place.' "

The angel was not long in coming.

Maggie left two fatal legacies to her sister Ailsa. One was a pure white shawl worked all over in beautiful embroidery with white silk, which her soldier brother in India had sent her, and of which she was so fond that she asked that it might be folded round her as soon as she died and only taken off just before she was carried off for her last drive. Then it was to be given to her favourite sister Ailsa.

The other legacy consisted of germs of her disease. Ailsa had slept next her in her small bed, which contained three each night. After her sister's death the girl gradually failed and faded, but she was always so bright, so full of pluck, that she put aside careful forethought. It was the weather made her ill to-day, or work

had been extra trying lately—such a rush of it—or she had taken a little chill.

When she grew so ill that she was obliged to seek a doctor's aid, she was too far gone for him to cure. It was just a case of patching up, and the patching up was not very successful. There was never enough food or enough air to make it so.

As the months passed the weather grew very severe and the work seemed more trying than ever before; there was no more of it than usual, but Ailsa's strength was not equal to coping with it. The constant pain in her chest and the wearisome cough took it all.

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Nearly every factory girl has a special "pal," and with some the love is as lasting as it is intense. For her "pal" she will deny herself, aye, even starve herself. Ailsa had hers in her friend Bettie. However difficult things were at work, or hard with father and mother at home, she always felt there was one bit of brightness to look forward to when work was over and done, and that was spending the evening with Bettie at some place of amusement or at their Guild. Bettie often went without

her dinner to buy Ailsa grapes to moisten her throat and help to stop the cough. Sometimes it was one little dainty and sometimes another, and her tender love and sympathy made the burden of suffering lighter.

No one could ever imagine when seeing the girl at night, with her pretty colour and bright eyes, full of laughter at some droll witticism, how hard she found it when she woke in the early morning to face each day's suffering and responsibility, never equipped with sufficient strength, never ready for all that must be done.

Factory girls are wonderful in the way they throw off care during their few hours of leisure. Perhaps it is just that which makes life endurable, and the hope, which seems to be ever present with sustaining power, that some day it may be full of ease and gorgeous in colour. Their view of happiness is somewhat like that of the old lady whose sole idea of the bliss of heaven was "to lie on a green bank with nothing to do for ever and ever."

Some years ago it was stated that one of the members of the Guild was about to marry a wealthy man. The news was at first received

with incredulity. When it was found to be true one said to another :

“ I say, don’t you wish you was ‘er ? Think of it ! Nothing to do all day long ! Plenty to eat and plenty of fine clothes as well as warm ones ! I say, don’t you wish you was ‘er ? ”

“ Well,” said the other, “ tastes differ. She’s twenty and he’s forty—just double her age. Of course, for them as have a love of the antique he’s all right, but I’d prefer to have more modern furniture about my house. No, I don’t wish I was ‘er.”

“ Where did you get your pretty name, Ailsa ? ”

“ Oh, that was from some of mother’s grand folks : she went about and saw a lot of the gentry when she was young ; that, and being Scotch, makes her different from these London people. I don’t know as it’s made her any happier being different like, for the neighbours only think she’s a stuck-up thing ; but she ain’t, it’s natural to mother, and it’s a cruel shame to take offence just because she ain’t like them—she can’t help being different.

“ You see, her father had something to do with Holyrood in Edinburgh. She knew every inch of the place, even the room where she was afraid to go of nights, in case Mary Queen of Scots or some of her kings, or friends, or lovers, might be walking, because murder had been done there. Mother never saw Mary Queen of Scots herself, as woman or ghost, but everybody says that she was so beautiful that they called her a— Well, I can’t remember the name, my head gets like that now, so stupid, forgetting everything ; but its a thing that makes a big bellow on the steamers, a—a—syren, that’s the word. Do you think they called her that because she bellowed at her kings, and that was her way of getting rid of one before taking up with another ? For according to mother she was married to a good many people.

“ She used to give little suppers to her favourite maids of honour and grand gents, in quite a tiny room, mother says it was, and it was in this little sort of supper-bar that one of the most dreadfulest murders was done, that made mother afraid to sleep of nights in case they came again ; for some do say as

they have to do the whole bloody murder over again every night, after twelve o'clock, as a penance to all eternity. I think they must get to sort o' feel it's a kind of play-acting doing it so often, and not find it hard at last, nor be half so scared as the people sleeping harmless in their beds that they wakes up with their goings on.

“Mother says it's being brought up in the caller Scotch air makes her long for sniffs of country breezes and so fond of flowers. We've never been so poor but mother has had some flowers blooming on the window-sill—sometimes quite a show, as she has now, see! When father is in a good mood he remembers the old days and goes off to buy her a pot in bloom of some flowers she used to grow in her old Scotch garden when she was a girl.

“I can't think what in the name of wonder made mother fall in love with father! P'r'aps I oughtn't to say that, but I tell you thoughts. Once I said something like it to mother when she was covered with bruises he'd given her. She just fired up in a moment and said, ‘If you could only see your father as he was when he was young you'd fall in love with him

yourself ; braw and bonny he was when he came courting me. In all these crowded London streets there isn't a man to compare with him to-day as he was then ! But that was before he took to drink."

"We must get him to give that up."

"I've tried so hard. Now I've given up in despair ; he never will."

"We try and fail in so many ways. But there is a Force which compels, which never fails. And there is a way of reaching that Force. Have you ever thought how it can be done ? "

"Do you mean that stone the old monks were always hunting for—the Flossepher's stone ? I heard an open-air speaker talk of that. It turned everything to gold that it touched. Wouldn't it be a stroke of good fortune to find that ? "

"No, I didn't mean that. This is even more powerful than that, and it is near for all who seek to find. The monks often gave their whole lives to finding the Philosopher's Stone and never succeeded."

• • • • •
April days, with their warm winds blowing

from the sun, but keen frosty nights, tried Ailsa sorely. She failed visibly. The doctor said she was living on pluck, but a blow had been struck at that too, and when that was gone what was left? Bettie, her pal, had become engaged. Ailsa was glad indeed for Bettie's sake, as it made her happy, but for herself it was desolation.

Bravely Betty sought to be exactly the same to her friend as she was of old, but there were nights when the young man wanted her to go to some entertainment with him or take her to see his people. Black-letter days were these for Ailsa—no evening with Bettie to look forward to! Harder than ever Bettie strove to procure little luxuries for Ailsa, and something specially good on those nights when she had to be parted from her. She had not found it hard to go without food for her, but now a more severe test presented itself. The new hat, the pretty ribbon or lace which she covered to appear more pleasing in the eyes of her lover, had to be forfeited, and when her sacrifices were made Ailsa would sometimes, when in extra pain, turn to her with, "I don't want your things; it's *you* I want." And

Bettie, seeing the young man look with favour on girls attired in more gorgeous gear, fought out the old question so many have had to fight —“Are love and sacrifice worth while?” At any rate they don’t turn out in life’s hard battles as they do more often in story-books. Things painted from the life do not always have a happy ending, however hard one tries to live aright.

“Oh, I’m so thankful you’ve come in.”

Ailsa was in bed, her teeth chattering, the rickety bedstead shaking with her fright.

“What is wrong, dear child?”

“I thought I heard father’s step on the stair.”

“Are you so afraid of him as all that?”

“Well! you see, he says I ought to be at work, that I’m quite able, not ill at all, just ‘putting on,’ and skulking. Mother never leaves me now if she can anyhow help it, but to-day they were all obliged to go out. The last time I was left alone he came in very drunk, and finding me lying here, he dragged me to the bottom of the bed, jolting my neck on to the iron bar of the bedstead, and then

he bent my head down over it at the back as low as ever he could, pulling me by the hair and muttering, 'I'll break yer neck if you don't get up and turn to and earn money like the rest. I'll give you a lesson in skulking once for all.'

"And it would have been once for all if one of the lodgers hadn't come by the door in the nick of time and seen what he was doing of and shouted loud for some one to come and help him pull father off, for he's so strong. He don't mean it, you know ; he's a kind father when all right ; it's the devil goes in with the drink and makes him do his bidding."

A little lull came in the talking, and Ailsa began to tremble again.

"There's his step on the stair, no mistake this time. Whatever shall we do ?" she cried.

"Just keep still and ask God to take care of us. Think of Daniel in the lions' den."

"I'd rather have a den full of lions sober than one father drunk," she gasped.

True enough it was father ! But not mad drunk this time—in a much milder stage. He burst into the room. Then stood perfectly

still with open mouth, staring at Ailsa's visitor.

“ You are surprised to see me, Mr. MacDougal ! It isn’t often I have the pleasure of meeting you, though I know your wife and daughters so well.”

“ You pamper this thing. She’s just shamming, I tell you. I hate skulkers.”

“ So do I.”

“ Turn her out of that, then.”

“ She is not a skulker.”

“ Not a skulker ! Just look at her, the picture of health, with her fine colour. All she needs is a lesson, and my wife’s too soft a fool to give it, so I must.”

“ The colour is caused by the disease, and the fear and terror you put her into. You will not lay a finger on her while I am here.”

“ Oh ! ” he jeered, “ I’ve had you flung in my teeth often enough.”

“ I’m sorry you didn’t find me a tempting morsel, but I’m not so bad as I look. My feeling about you is that you are a very nice man spoilt. I should like to have seen you when you first went courting your wife. She

tells me you were the bravest man she ever set eyes on."

"Did she say that?"

"A great deal more than that."

"On the wrong side, I reckon."

"She keeps the best side for me, so I know you as you *are*, not as what drink makes you. Be a man and give it up."

"And be called 'barmy' by all my mates."

"Any fool can go with the tide! It takes a man, such as Mr. MacDougal used to be, to go against the tide, even if it's only beer."

"I believe you are right there."

"I know it. Sign the pledge with me to-day."

"Not to-day, lady; I'll think it over."

"Thinking it over is not what Sandy MacDougal would have done many years ago. He would have been eager, impetuous to do the brave thing as soon as it was apparent to him that it was the manly and right thing to do."

"You have got that faith in him?"

"I've got that faith in him as he was, and in you as you are. You want to do the right thing now, and are terribly cut up the next

morning when you've been cruel to your wife or children over-night."

"That's true for you, lady."

"So true that you will agree with me it's best to make an end of it. Here is a pencil and here is a pledge; they will be your greatest help in walking straight, for by them you promise with Divine assistance to keep the pledge, and enough assistance is readily given to those who really desire to conquer. Why, man! you'll keep it and be a king among men by this time next year!"

"I'll sign, so-'elp-me-God!"

• • • •

"You'll come and take a last look at Ailsa, won't you? She was dreadful sorry, poor wee lamb, that you were away from home at the last. She wearied so to see you and to tell you how glad she was to go to the home 'country.' 'Tell her,' she said, 'it's well with me. It's better than well, it's just lovely. I'll be rid of all my pain and never be tired any more. Such lots of things I've always wanted to do, and couldn't, and now I'll have the strength to do them. It isn't going out alone into the dark at all, but just going through the gate of the

loveliest sunset you ever saw. Lift up your heads, ye golden gates—and He is the Light thereof—a city that hath no need of a sun—a Light even better than the sun, and no more miserable fogs for evermore. Tell her I'd never have known it so easy to lie here this long time, or so easy to go up there, if it hadn't been for the Guild and all the kind people in it who help us all. . . . Give her the shawl that Maggie left me (you'll put it round me just as you did round Maggie—I shan't spoil it, lying so still). I'd like to feel she had it to wear at the Guild when it's cold. It's something to always remember me by. I'll never forget her, and I'll wait at the golden gate when her turn comes to enter.' "

"She was quite peaceful and happy to the very last, giving thoughts and kind messages to us all till she couldn't say no more. Her father has been greeting sore at the loss of her, just when he'd been such a different man ; it's hard to feel she is going away. No one could have tried harder than he's done to make up for the past."

"You will both try and think of what a lovely time she is having now, always happy

and bright, never tired or in pain. Which day have you fixed for the funeral?"

"Next Saturday."

"But that is so long ahead; it will be over a week since she said 'Good-bye.' Do try and have it before that."

"Her father and others are afraid to ask the time off for a whole day, in case they get the sack, but they could ask for Saturday morning, and we can't get the insurance money before that to pay for everything—they always want it on the nail."

"But it is so bad for the rest of you."

"We ain't afeared of her, poor Ailsa; she wouldn't hurt a fly."

"But it injures the living to be so long in the same room with one whose life has gone; there are exhalations which escape from her body which you should fear for the other children."

"It isn't decent, I know, the way we live, but what else can we do? Rents are so high near the works, and there we must live, and we ain't never been able to afford another room. Too much crowding is better than debt. You see, there ain't anywhere else for Tom and Jean

to sleep—we've always had the rest in our room ; but the boy, being twenty, had to sleep with the girls. I gave him a separate corner, of course, and the girls went to bed first. And now I don't let Jean lie on the same bed as Ailsa, but give her a pitch on the floor, away from her brother's corner. They ain't afeared to be in the room. Poor Ailsa wouldn't hurt them nor let no spirit escape from her body to fright them."

"I did not mean that. It is nothing the poor child could help. You don't understand that poison rises from dead bodies which may kill the living."

"Well, some people may say it, but it's just a fad of people as can afford fads, and pr'aps they don't love their dead enough to want to keep them in sight just as long as ever they can."

"I know it's hard for you to see it ; but indeed it is true, and we must think of Jean's health now."

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"I am so sorry to send for you and give all this bother, but I'm in a peck of trouble. Jean ain't never been well since poor Ailsa

died ; now she's downright bad, and father's broke his pledge. He was keeping it so well, and then he was orful busy and couldn't get no food, but he come across a place where they sold some Temperance ale and went in and had a bottle, and it's so like the real thing that all the old taste came back, and he went straight off to a Public and got on the booze again, and come home mad drunk. Could you try and see him, and get him to sign again ? "

" Certainly I will try."

• • • • •

Jean went to a hospital and came back cured. Her father signed the pledge many times and failed. But there came a day when he had lost his work, was low in health, low in spirits, yet quite sober.

" Once more I ask you to sign the pledge with me. Be a man and keep it."

" Lady, I will do my utter best ; but you don't know, you never can know, how rough upon us poor souls comes thick temptations."

" Why, man, we all have temptations ; yours come in one form, mine in another. They never cease. When one kind is conquered

another set is aimed at us. What we have to do is to resist them all. It's far easier to say that than to do it, though!"

"I tell you, lady, you don't know what fierce temptation is. How should you? Your white soul has never been smirched like mine."

"You would find them pretty much of a muchness if you could only see, so we'll just make the best of them by helping one another to begin all over again, and with God's help we'll conquer this time."

I add to this story a case given me by a worker in the Ragged School Union, which proves the great and increasing necessity for legislation to prevent the spread of disease.

There are six children in the family, and the home is a miserably dirty room in Shoreditch. One of the children developed tuberculosis, and no steps were taken to isolate her. When the worker who told me of the case called to see the mother, she found the stench almost too great to permit her to enter. The mother was lying on the bed with the child, who had open tubercular wounds discharging on her very body. The child was eight years old. As a result of the want of isolation and care, all the

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children are developing disease. One is in Bart's with meningitis, another is in a Home, and another has tubercular hip and spinal disease. They are all engaged in making toy tennis bats.

CHAPTER XV

GIN AND BITTERS

SOME three or four years ago, a gentleman of rather astute financial ability was talking to me of the value and prospects of certain stocks and shares. There was at that time a particular brewery in whose concerns he was much interested ; and so sanguine was he of the return that money invested in this concern would bring, that he strongly advised my taking some interest in it. In his own way the man was thoughtful and good ; he would not willingly have done any one an injury. Knowing this, I said to him :

“ You are recommending a woman to obtain a monetary interest in a liquor concern, a promising brewery. Do you ever happen to have wandered round in the poorer streets of London on a Saturday night ? And if so, have

you ever noticed the occupants of the various public-houses?"

He looked at me, quite surprised. "Of course I have," he said. "It is an absolute disgrace to civilisation the way these foul places are packed with women, many of them with little babies in their arms."

"Then," I asked further, "have you ever been into the homes of any of these women?"

"Not I," he said. "Precious homes they must be!"

"They are," I answered quietly. "Homes founded on gin and bitters—the gin mostly all gone, but the bitters always remain. And yet you would recommend shares which depend for their prosperity on such homes as those?"

"Not at all, not at all!" he said, quite huffily. "These shares are in a respectable brewery where they make thoroughly sound and wholesome beer and stout."

"Ever seen a baby drunk on beer?" I asked.

"Of course not," he said, quite angrily. "Preposterous!"

"Not at all," I said. "On the contrary, it is quite an ordinary occurrence among the

class of people who work for the appreciation of such shares as you recommend."

He quoted to me the Act which was passed in 1901, which forbids the sale of intoxicating liquors to children less than fourteen years of age. And I was obliged to tell him of horrible sights I had seen in many of the poor quarters of London, where babies, having sips from their mother's glasses and beer-mugs, fell intoxicated about the floor of the public-houses or the pavements of the filthy streets.

I told him of a woman who one morning, in a public-house near Clapham Junction, drank twelve glasses of beer within an hour, and, stumbling out again, gained the platform with her baby in her arms. By that time she was so drunk that she dropped the child, and, quite oblivious of the fact, she lurched on without it. A friendly porter picked up the helpless bundle and made after her, earning for himself a thump in the chest when he accosted her.

I felt that heaven itself would not be a sufficient prize to gain, if the cost was to be the ruin of women and the torture of little children.

Some of the greatest physicians in this

kingdom have discussed the consequences arising out of the drinking habits now so prevalent among women. Again and again they have used voice and pen in protest against the terrible evil which is being done to the children of the race. It is true that among the sweated workers the women very rarely drink, although in most cases the fathers and husbands almost habitually do so—it is the children of the working classes who are made to pay the penalty of the father's and mother's sin in this respect.

The cost to the State and Community of this licence extended to women can never be properly calculated. I have gleaned some cases which will illustrate the injury to the children and the expense to all of us who concern ourselves directly or indirectly in such matters.

The following cases were met with in that splendid institution The Cripples' Nursery, 29, Park Road, Regent's Park. This place was opened in 1862, and forms a refuge for about fifty boys and girls, who are admitted from three years old and kept there until they are twelve. These children are suffering from various complaints, and all are crippled.

Emily is the illegitimate child of a drunken mother, who has four or five other illegitimate children. The child is suffering from paralysis, the result of neglect and the general conditions of such a home as hers.

Another little boy is paralysed in both legs. His mother is dead, and he was deserted by his father, who left him to the workhouse, from whence he was rescued and sent to the Home. At the age of twelve he will be sent into a Cripples' Industrial Home, where he will be taught a trade.

Another sad case is that of a little girl, who was thrown on the fire by her drunken mother when a baby, with the result that she has hip disease. The father is dead, and the mother, who was a confirmed drunkard, ended her days in a lunatic asylum, a short time ago. The home was an intensely miserable one.

A shockingly sad instance of a child being crippled by the cruelty of its mother was given me by a worker in the Ragged School Union. In this case the father is a decent and comparatively refined and educated man, and devoted to his three children; but the mother is a drunken virago, with apparently a deadly hatred

for her eldest child. She knocked her about persistently, and a heavier blow than usual resulted in her having hip disease. She was in a hospital for seven weeks, and it was arranged that she should go to a convalescent home on leaving. Unfortunately, however, the mother got hold of her, and refused to let her go. In one of her drunken fits the mother was attacking one of the younger children, but little Mary A——, who is a heroine at heart, despite the fact that she was wearing an instrument and crutches, got the child back against the wall, and placed herself in front of her to shield her. In a wild fit of rage the mother struck at Mary, who fell heavily to the ground, breaking the instrument and fainting in her extreme pain. She was left on the floor until she recovered, when she managed to crawl to the house of a relative, where she fainted from pain on the step. From here she was quietly sent away to a home, where she stayed for six months, and became very much better. At the end of that time she returned to the mother, who had already been warned by an inspector from the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. The father, tired out with work, was one day

sleeping in his chair, when he heard his child calling for help, and turning round, he saw the mother tearing her face down with her nails. He rescued her, and locked the woman up in a room. Shortly after the inspector called again, and seeing the state Mary was in, took steps in the matter, with the result that the mother is now undergoing a term of imprisonment, and the father is leaving the neighbourhood with his children, in order that the woman may not be able to find him when she comes out, as he hopes to get a separation order, with custody of the children. So it is hoped poor little Mary's trials—she is now about fourteen—are over, though she must always be a cripple. But for the drunken habits of the mother, the home might have been a happy and comfortable one.

There is no philanthropic institution dealing with children that is not able to give one appalling cases of the results to these helpless creatures of the drunkenness of their parents. I give the cases of several children who have been admitted to Doctor Barnardo's Homes.

Annie H. (6) and Edwin H. (3).—Father sent to prison for six weeks, some time ago, for neglecting his children. Subsequently died from

pneumonia, leaving nine children—eldest fourteen, youngest an infant. Mother, heavy drinker, said to be immoral. Family under notice of Liverpool S.P.C.C. since 1902. Eventually found necessary to prosecute mother for shameful neglect and ill-treatment. Home a dirty, foul-smelling room. Children's bed consisted of a few rags—little or no covering. Mother found helplessly drunk on the floor, children lying round her. Magistrates formally committed children to our care.

Bertha R. (12), Annie R. (7), and Jessie R. (6).—Mother died over four years ago. Father, notorious drunkard and immoral character, practically lives on the streets. After mother's death consorted with abandoned woman, to whose influences girls were subjected, until her death, a short time since. Father occupies two rooms in one of the worst streets of the town, where the police go about in pairs, and almost every house is known as a den of immorality. Girls got food at free breakfast room, or in school at midday, and this was all they had to eat. Terribly neglected, and daily familiarised with scenes of the most demoralising description. . . .

Mary C. (11).—Mother died some years ago. Father, miner, of idle, drunken, degraded character. Has not done a stroke of work for months. Is consorting with woman notorious for her open and shameless immorality. Both she and father treated girl most cruelly, beat her with buckled strap, starved her, and turned her out of house late at night. Medical examination showed her to be covered with bruises, and in condition of nervous terror. Man and woman sent to prison for six months with hard labour. Mary committed to our care by magistrates.

These cases merely emphasise the cry that has been taken up over and over again by private individuals, by magazines and newspapers, by many and many a society, regarding the fearful cost to the nation—mentally, morally, physically, and financially—of these drunken parents who, bringing children into the world with no sense of responsibility, cast them calmly on our hands.

It is the least we can do, seeing how supine we are in the matter of reform, to support the Institutions which take in and protect some of these unfortunate children. But however

merciful these Institutions are, and however we may pride ourselves upon their magnificent usefulness, it is a shame to every individual in this country that there is a need for them to exist at all. The torment these helpless children suffer at the hands of their brutal owners, before they are rescued by the brave workers of such Institutions as Doctor Barnardo's and the Ragged School Union, can never be forgotten, nor the consequences of it entirely obliterated.

Why should the nation endure a condition of things which lays such a burden of suffering on the most defenceless of the community, and such heavy financial obligations on all the respectable workers? There must be something terribly wrong with our political leaders when such desperately wasteful conditions prevail among our people. The impoverishment of the nation from such causes is an open scandal.

CHAPTER XVI

“ HERE AND THERE ”

I WAS once endeavouring to make a collection of pictures of the sweated workers and children in their homes. Taking photographs of the poor and working classes is at any time a difficult matter, and the sweated workers especially have a profound objection to being “ made pictures of.” For one thing they are terribly afraid lest they might be recognised by their masters and given “ the sack.” But some of these workers, whom I and my friends knew very well, consented to allow me to photograph them in their own rooms. For this privilege I paid most of them far more than they could earn by a week’s work. I had intended to take the photographs myself, but having been prevented from doing so, I employed a photographer who knows the people well and lives in the East End. When the

proofs were sent to me I looked at them and laughed until I nearly cried ! The pictures were all of places I knew quite well, yet I did not recognise them. One picture represented a room in which lived a man and his wife and four children. The man and woman worked at tailoring trousers. The room was a tiny one, with smoke-blackened ceiling. There was only one bed, in which slept the father and mother and two children ; the two elder ones slept on a bundle of rags on the floor. The walls were unspeakably filthy and the room was vermin-ridden. There had been some attempt at decoration : a few penny pictures hung on the walls, and on the mantelshelf above the stove one or two penny china ornaments had place. The picture of the room and the workers was taken at the lightest hour of the day, and the poor creatures had made an effort to smarten up the place as far as they could. It was a dismal home at best, with not one redeeming feature—but in the photograph it presented such a comely appearance that I felt as if a practical joke had been played on me. The pictures came out distinctly, and looked quite charming ; no trace of the dirt

or evil odours of the place lurked about the photograph. It is true the consumptive face of the man at the ironing board looked pathetic, but the woman had put on her Sunday cloak—a pitiful thing through which the light showed in threadbare patches, yet in the picture it gave her an air of being positively well dressed! I reluctantly put this effort at depicting the lives of the poor away. I regret to say that I have never yet seen a photograph which could do more than meagrely convey an idea of the appalling conditions under which so many of our fellow-creatures live.

I have tried to write this story in as dispassionate a way as possible. Those who know how things are with the children whose history I have recorded, will say I ought to have given a better description of their homes and their own physical conditions. I have avoided particular descriptions because they would be so terribly nauseating. Those people who accuse writers on these subjects of extravagance and exaggeration have only to go down any day or any hour into the slums which surround not only London, but most of our great cities to north, and south, and east, and west—

and if they but chance upon some of these home workers they will see for themselves the conditions under which the future citizens of England are being reared.

From a paper published on April 20, 1907, I take a column on sweating which has been inspired by a case lately in the Courts.

“It is a long time since Burns wrote his expressive couplet—

‘Man’s inhumanity to man
Makes countless thousands mourn.’

But, inhuman as man often is to his fellows, he is frequently much more inhuman to women—especially if the latter happen to be in a defenceless position. A perfectly shocking instance of sweating in its most odious form has, through a Coroner’s Inquest, come to light within the last few days. The tragic story was unfolded by the mother and grandmother of the child victim of want. Thin, haggard, and young, the mother related how, deserted by her husband, she had endeavoured to support herself by washing and charing, by which, however, she never earned more than seven shillings a week. This was bad enough,

but the grandmother told the jury that she was employed at trouser finishing by an English firm, and the price paid for this work was twopence a pair ! Here is the dialogue which took place between the woman and the 'Court.'

"*The Juror*: 'Does that pay well ? I have heard something about it.'

"*Witness* : 'I get twopence a pair. (Sensation.) I have often worked until four o'clock in the morning to get a crust of bread.'

"*The Foreman* : 'Splendid ! and this is in our fine country ! Please note that this is English sweating.'

"*The Coroner* : 'Was the work brought to you ?'

"*Witness* : 'No, sir ; I had to go and fetch it and take it home again.'

"Unfortunately no penalty can be enforced in a case of this kind, though one's blood boils with indignation at the thought of such oppression. But is it not high time that some more drastic method than impotent indignation was discovered to put a stop to these detestable practices ? In *Darkest England*, speaking of the dread alternative by which so many of

our women are confronted—starve or sin—General Booth says :

“‘ These enormities are callously inflicted and silently borne by these miserable victims. Nor is it only the women who are the victims, although their fate is the most tragic. Those firms which reduce sweating to a fine art, who systematically and deliberately defraud the workman of his pay, who grind the faces of the poor, who rob the widow and the orphan, and who for a pretence make great professions of public spirit and philanthropy, these men now-a-days are sometimes sent to Parliament to make laws for the people. The old prophets sent them to hell ; but we have changed all that. They send their victims to hell, and are rewarded by all that wealth can do to make their lives comfortable.’

“ To a large extent the public have the remedy in their own hands ; but until the law rigidly determines the minimum wage to be paid to these helpless home-workers, sweating will, to a certain extent, continue. The public benefactor who runs his business solely for the good of the poor has not yet arrived, nor indeed is it to be expected that he will. But

decent conditions and fair pay should be obtained for all classes, even though of necessity it must be obtained by compulsion."

· · · · ·

It has been my fortune to visit almost every great city in this kingdom, and in reviewing this matter of "Baby Toilers" I can only say that the evil is by no means confined to London. When I visited Birmingham, on several occasions I was invited to see the model village and factory established by Mr. George Cadbury in the neighbourhood of that prosperous city. Birmingham prides itself on its progress and enlightenment ; but in spite of this shining example of the comfort and prosperity that well-organised labour can bring, there are many black chapters in Birmingham's daily history ; and through all the roar and bustle of her rich trade the bitter, sharp sob of the child slave will cut its way to ears not dulled by selfish greed.

After I had seen the fine buildings, the Parks, the Model Factory at Bourneville, and various other proud monuments of Birmingham's prosperity, I travelled down to some of the poor quarters of the town, and saw

gaunt hunger and savage toil, and homes where little children are held in slavery long hours each day. But I have not lived in Birmingham : I saw these things casually as a visitor, against the wishes or desires of those who would have had me see only the pleasant things. But I will give you a description written by Vincent Wray in *The Birmingham Express* regarding some of the child workers of that town.

“‘It seems incredible ; it is monstrous !’ In these words Councillor Marsh condemned child- and woman-sweating in Birmingham. And doubtless every other member of the City Council will surely be equally indignant. It is almost incredible that children who are mere infants in years should have to work through the desolate days and nights for pittances, and that every joy of childhood—brightness and playfulness—should be denied them.

“Here is a picture of what I found in one of the eastern streets of hustling and enlightened Birmingham. A woman, pallid and scantily clad, sat at a small deal table. Four children, one of them a baby three and a half years, were huddled together in front of an

empty fire grate. The woman was stitching eyes on to a card, which was then handed to one of her young family, who fixed in the hooks. Then the card was passed to a girl of thirteen, who stitched the hooks, and so completed the work.

“The work continued with unending monotony. There was no pause for rest or recreation. The mother, gaunt and half famished, laboured on with dreadful devotion to her dreary task ; the children toiled with a mechanical precision that was terrible in those so young.

“Child life is no longer child life in the houses of these sweated workers. There is no merriment sparkling in the eyes, no laughter rippling from parted lips, no healthy flush on rounded cheeks. This is the day’s routine of this family—here in Birmingham, mind :

6.0 a.m.	.	.	.	Carding begins.
8.0 a.m.	.	.	.	A hasty snatch of food, and carding resumed.
9.0 a.m.	.	.	.	Children go to school.
12.30 a.m.	.	.	.	Children home again and recommence carding.
2.0 p.m.	.	.	.	School again.
5.0 p.m.	.	.	.	Carding resumed till 8 or 9.

"There are two more intervals for food, which is never good or plentiful. What this means to young children it is easy to imagine. But of every ten workers seven at least complain that the fixing of the hooks, some of which are so small that they are appropriately termed 'Midgets,' is affecting their eyesight; many of the little hands tremble from the strain, and each individual worker bears the haggard impress of want and misery.

"'What do I make?' repeated one woman with a doleful intonation of her voice. 'Why, if I work all day I can earn four shillings a week; but,' she added with a gesture of despair, 'I have to find my own needles and cotton.'

"A family of five can earn from ten to eleven shillings—at the sacrifice of health and hope and happiness. What a price to pay for the right to exist!

"Woeful tales some of these sweated workers tell. 'I am an invalid,' said a poor creature of twenty-nine. She looked it. In a bare back bedroom she lay on a comfortless mattress. She had known better days. Now she was fighting starvation with her needle and hooks

and eyes. 'It's weary work,' she said as the needle fell from her nerveless hand, 'but I should starve without it.'

"Two doors away is a crippled girl. She has never walked—she never will. She sits by the window, where, when she has a minute to spare, she looks out upon the dull grey street. She is busy, always—'Stitch, stitch, stitch,' as Tom Hood puts it. Ask her if she is happy, and she shakes her head sadly with a half-frightened 'No, sir.'

"'I mustn't stop to play,' said a six-year-old boy, as he rushed out of his school-yard yesterday. He had no time to play. Think of it—at six he had entered upon the tragedy of life!

"'We don't live, we die—by inches,' exclaimed a widowed woman with a sickly smile. There had been days different ; but they were now only a memory—a fleeting shade. 'We toil for a crust, and are lucky if we get it,' she said.'"

In Liverpool and Manchester, which cities I have visited several times on different occasions, conditions are no better. Very rich and pros-

perous these cities are, but among the poorest workers the children invariably add their strength to the toil which is to produce food and shelter. Of clothes they do not boast any reserve—their wardrobe is carried on their backs. The child worker in these cities often sleeps on heaps of filthy rags.

And so one might travel from town to town of this wealthy kingdom ; and always below the surface of flaunting prosperity one may find a hideous residue of those who seem born into slavery. If I am unsympathetic towards the scheme for feeding these wretched little starving school-children, it is not from any selfishness or lack of sympathy with their condition, but simply from a conviction that the easing of the parents from all responsibilities will make it harder for the next batch of children who come along, and will lay disabilities on the children of decent working folk, who will not be able to give their own children the advantages they now can give them, if they are asked to maintain the children of drunkards and professional "out-of-works."

A more effectual protection for these children lies in the work of the Wages Boards, and

the establishing of a Minimum Wages Bill. These reforms, together with two others—the compulsion of all idle men to work for the support of their families ; and an Act making it illegal for any foreigner to possess house property in poor districts—which is used for the purpose of gain by sub-letting or renting in tenements—would for ever kill the worst of the evils which now flourish in our midst.

Feeding the Multitude.—The feeding and housing of our labouring population has been made the subject not only of scientific inquiry, but of Royal Commissions, and the Commission on the Deterioration of the Race provided startling material for reflection on these two points. The health of the children of our poorer communities deteriorates steadily, and physical degeneration invariably means moral and mental retrogression. As long as children are fed on brawn and pickles, and tea and crusts, we cannot expect to see much improvement in racial conditions. As long as our children are housed like vermin, so long shall we reap a rich harvest of criminals and degenerates.

Under the existing state of affairs it is almost impossible for the very poor to obtain pure food: everything they buy is adulterated and of vicious quality. They do not need to purchase Chicago meats; they can buy refuse highly seasoned just as cheaply which is made in their own country, and some small relic of patriotism makes them prone to patronise their own "home industries." I missed the delights of the Chicago Potting Factories when I visited that delectable city, but my knowledge of food factories in this kingdom makes me bold to say that I doubt whether America has any reason to boast over our ingenuity.

There is on foot just now a project for establishing day nurseries for babies throughout this kingdom, where the children will be properly fed. There can be no doubt of the necessity of this measure, but how will it affect the community if this added burden is placed on their resources? Unless such places after establishment can be made self-supporting, they will be the fruitful cause of more drunkenness and idleness; but if the parents are compelled *without exception* to pay for the care of their children in these places, then indeed they might

be made aids to the development of the nation's physical welfare.

I have not tried to deal with this subject of child toilers from a scientific view, but more from the point that an ordinary citizen can see and understand. Sometimes if one can touch the hearts of the people one reaches their heads, and head and heart together might surely join in baser union than for the awaking of a great cry throughout all this kingdom against the wrongs of the little ones.

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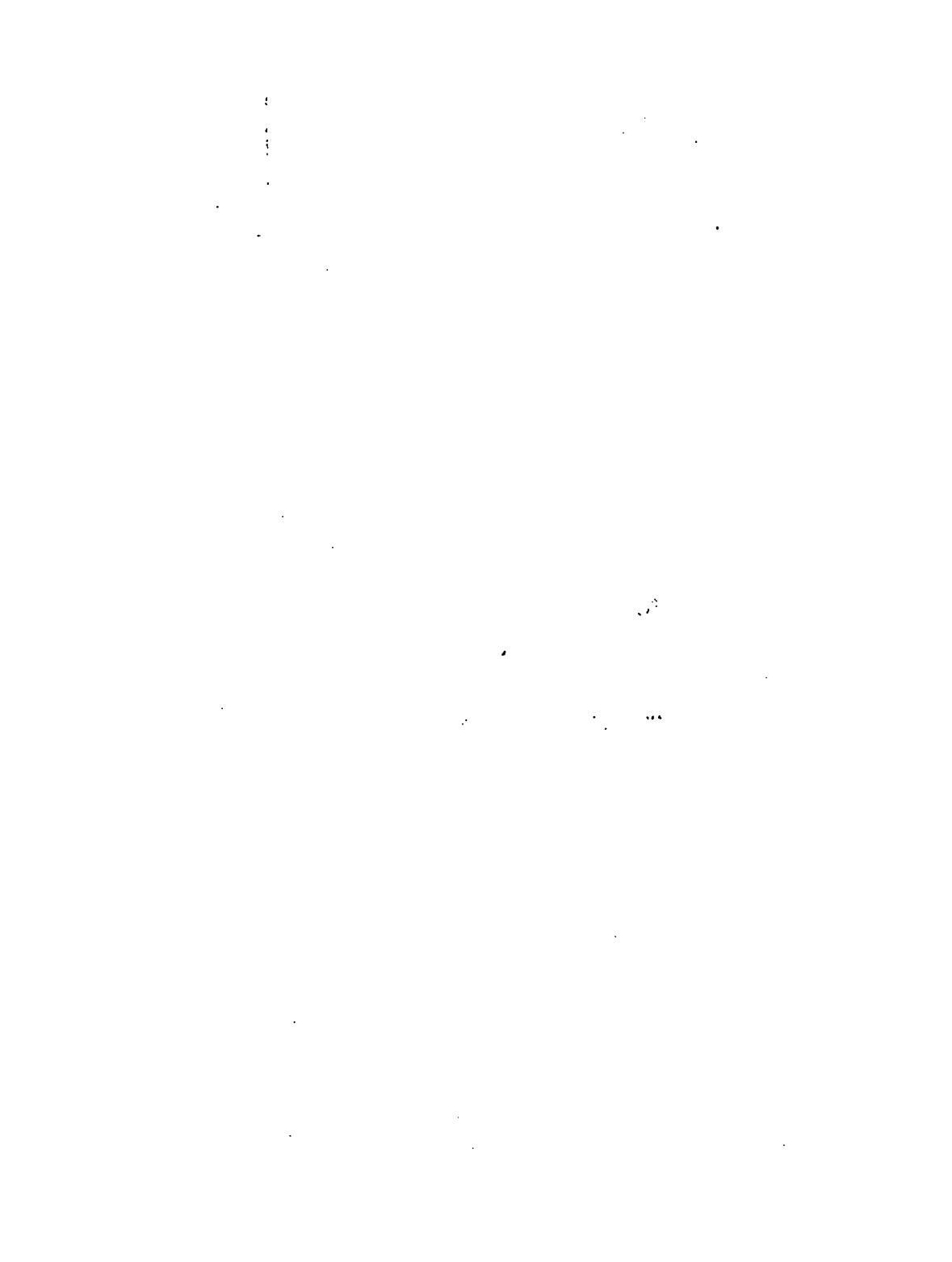
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